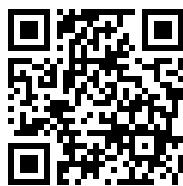
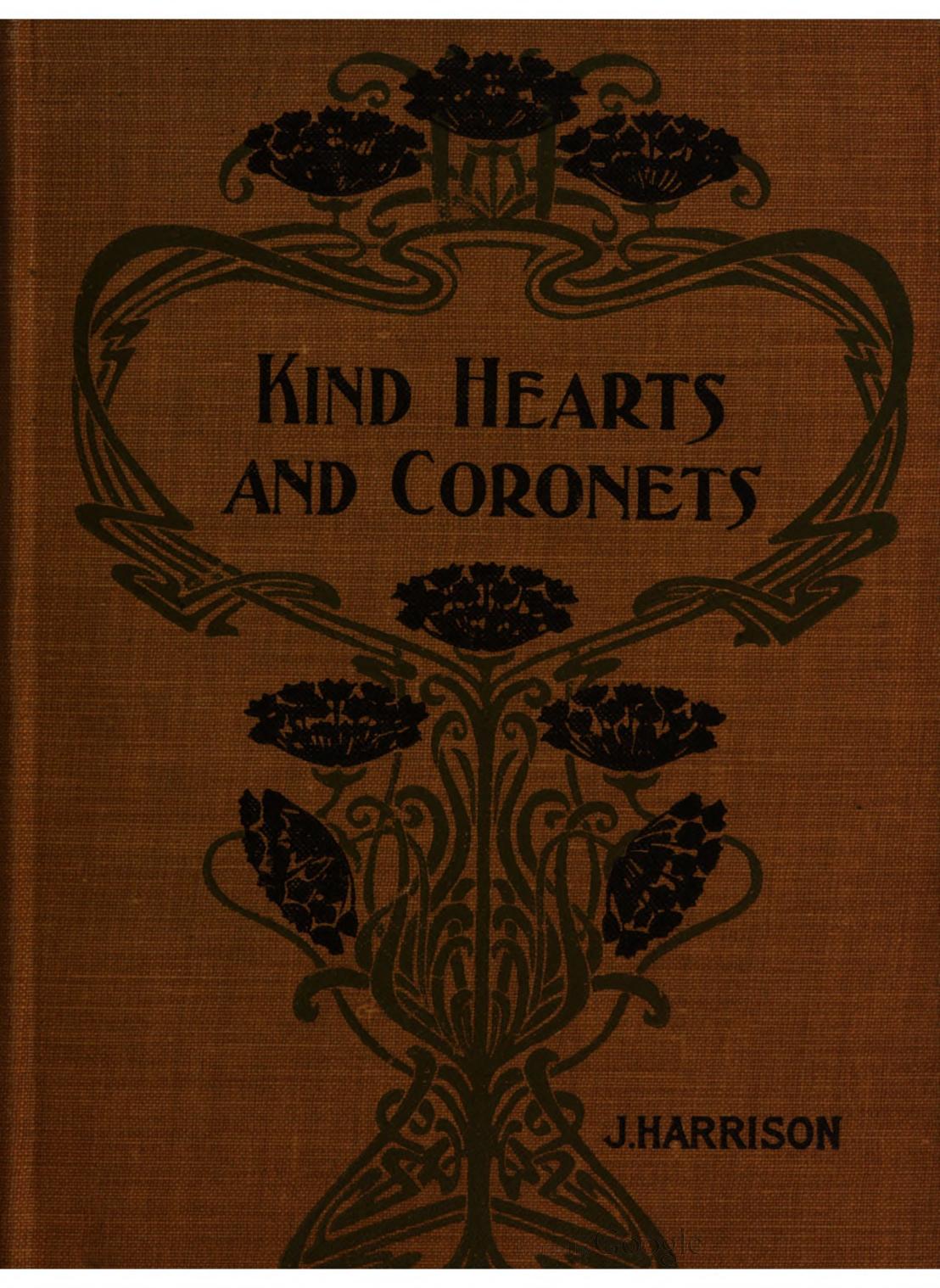

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KIND HEARTS
AND CORONETS

J. HARRISON



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Christmas 1904

“KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS”

“KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS”

By J. HARRISON

“Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood.”

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO:
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“KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS.”

CHAPTER I.

A TELEGRAM.

“SCHOOL, school, *school!* I hate it—I just *hate* it! School in the morning when a fellow wants to sleep—school at noontime when a fellow wants to eat—school in the afternoon when a fellow wants to play—and as if that isn’t enough we get home work to do! And ‘most every other Saturday it rains! I wish I was grown up or—something. Anything so long as I didn’t have to go to school!”

The twelve-year-old boy who had just come dashing down the stairs, with a noise and a shout that argued well for both the life in him and the power of his lungs, rushed into the dining-room now with this characteristic plaint upon his lips. And indeed it was a morning to try the will of one stronger-minded than a twelve-year-old boy. Spring was late this year, but once started, the green things of Mother Earth were sprouting luxuriantly, with a bright and tender freshness. Through the open window came the dewy fragrance of the fields, and the sun touched the gray mountains in the west to golden glory. Alas, for the luckless school boy! He knew the finest woodland haunts ready for his exploring; “the fellows” and he had a gala scheme ready for the summer that was fast approaching—even the place was selected, and they were eager to start the building of the one-storied house for which Dick Nolan, the carpenter, had drawn the plans. It was to stand at the very edge of the Saugatuck, where a chap could throw his hook out of the window and catch enough fish for breakfast while he was dressing! Great idea that—for a twelve-year-old!

But alas and alack, there was school! May and June—two more months of it! And a morning like this going to waste! And last Saturday it rained, and next Saturday it would, too, probably! It was just exasperating!

The young man thrust both hands deep into the pockets of his short knickerbockers—down deep he thrust them, until his shoulders curved over and his chin sunk into his chest. A frown formed between the merry hazel eyes—a frown so dark that one might well call it a scowl—and that smooth forehead had never been formed by nature for such scowling. He stood looking out at the green grass sparkling in the morning sunshine, at the road that wound like a dusty white ribbon up past the little cottage to the main street, branching off here and there into tangled paths of wildwood sweetness—paths that led to the silver stream luring him on even now, to the Saugatuck, to Compo Beach. He knew every nook and cranny in wood or rock as only a country boy could know them. And he sighed—and that sigh was like the puffing of a winded stout man, so deep was it and so full of care.

“Good morning, brother Philip.”

The boy turned quickly. A young girl was sitting in the rocker at the other window. She had a fair face, and was clad in a loose-fitting gown of some delicate shade that set off the exquisite whiteness of her skin. The morning paper was laid across her knees, but she had not taken it from its damp folds. Smiling broadly, she rocked herself to and fro, when her brother swung round, and she caught a full view of that lowering countenance.

“Where’d you hail from?” he asked, quickly. “Didn’t hear you come in.”

“Well, I heard *you* come in,” she retorted. “And more than that, I heard you coming down the stairs. Such a noisy boy! With a thump and a bump—enough to waken a dead person, I do declare, let alone poor Hugh! You should be more careful.”

He growled a little at this sisterly reproof, and turned back to the window. He had evidently gotten out the wrong side of the bed, for everything displeased him.

"Don't see that Hugh's of such great importance," he muttered. "Healthy house this is going to be if a fellow can't—"

The door that led into the kitchen opened just then and a neat serving-maid appeared, bringing with her an odor of buckwheat cakes and sausages and coffee. Phil was too young and too hungry to resist the savory appeal. His brow cleared as if by magic.

"Breakfast ready, Sue?" he asked, with boyish eagerness. "Where's mom?"

"Here she is!" answered a bright voice, and his mother followed the maid into the room. "Good morning, son."

"Good morning, mother," cheerfully. "Gee, things do smell fine, all right! Let's sit down, will you, mom? I'm half-starved. Call France."

"Never to breakfast, or to dinner, or to supper," laughed another bright voice, and a pair of merry hazel eyes, the exact counterpart of his own, peeped at him over her mother's shoulder. "I come without calling. Hello, bub!"

"Hello, sis!" he answered. "Can we sit down now, mom?"

"In a moment, dear." His mother glanced at the elder sister questioningly, but that young lady sat rocking herself with an absolutely non-committal countenance. The mother went to the table, stood looking at it a moment as if undecided, moved the dishes about, and at last held up the molasses cruet between her and the light.

"Run into the pantry and fill this, Sue," she said. "I know son will want maple sirup with his cakes after he has disposed of his sausages. Hurry now, like a good girl."

"That's right, Sue," said Phil, with fine approval. Agatha still rocked in silence, and her mother kept up a running fire of comments and questions. Several times Phil looked anxiously toward the door through which the maid had disappeared. Perhaps, despite her words, good Mrs. Lindsay had conveyed to her, in some subtle manner, the wish that she would not hurry.

"Guess I don't care much for maple sirup," said the boy at last, nonchalantly. "I'll take breakfast without it—can't I, mom? I'm half-starved," he finished, in a coaxing voice.

"If I am not mistaken, you said that before," remarked Agatha, with some asperity.

"Sue will be back right away," interposed Mrs. Lindsay. "Don't be in such a hurry. Hugh may be down soon, and it would not look well for us to take breakfast without him the very first morning he is home—and after so long an absence."

"It should scarcely be necessary to remind you of that, Phil," again remarked Agatha, in her cool, superior tones.

The graceless Phil did not seem in the least ashamed. Instead, an expression of the deepest injury came into his eyes, and his lips turned down sulkily.

"Hugh's asleep and don't know he's hungry—I'm awake, and you bet I know *I* am—and I've got to get to school besides—and Jim Hawkins said he'd be waiting up at the Path for me at eight o'clock with the rest of the fellows—and they ain't going to hang around an hour on my account—and Hugh's got a holiday—and he won't be down anyhow—I wouldn't if I were he—and—"

"Oh! oh! oh!" said Mrs. Lindsay, covering her ears with her hands. "Here is Sue now, laddie, and you can sit down at once. There, get into your place. Sue, please bring Phil his breakfast."

Phil dropped into his seat, made the sign of the cross hastily on his forehead, and tucked the napkin in at his neck. Agatha stopped rocking, looked at her mother in a surprised fashion, as if reproving her by that mute glance. Then, seeing that the mother wasn't paying a particle of attention to her, her little nose went up in the air.

"You can join him, France, if you want to," said Mrs. Lindsay. There was an amused smile quivering about the corners of her mouth. "You, also, Agatha, if you are hungry."

"No, thank you, mother," said Agatha, with scorn. "And even if I *were*, at least I should care to show Hugh *that* much respect. We haven't seen him in six months. I think you give Phil entirely too much of his own way, mother. It appears to me—"

"Now, now, that will do," said Mrs. Lindsay, still in her

pleasantest tones—but Agatha understood at once that a change in the conversation would be acceptable. Well, she resolved mentally, beginning to rock again, *her* children should not be reared in such a fashion. *Her* children should be all courtesy and politeness and refinement—there would be nothing vulgar or boisterous about *them*. Poor girl, she still had to face the experiences her mother had undergone in life's hard school—she still had to realize that live children are lively children, and that dead ones never eat, or laugh, either, for that matter. It was nothing new for a girl like Agatha to plan many things for future days—days that take all plans out of one's keeping, to shape them in different fashion.

Between Sue's rapid serving—for well she knew the young man's capabilities—and his mother's urging, Phil managed to store away such a breakfast as would astonish an ordinary adult. He was just lifting his third cup of coffee to his lips when a firm, quick step came along the hall, and the next moment Hugh Lindsay appeared in the doorway.

"Good morning, little mother!" He came over to her at once and greeted her with a hearty kiss. "And Agatha—why, how dainty the lily-maid looks! Too pale, by far. Not enough color in those cheeks, mother, since your grown-up daughter has a sweetheart. And Francie—you rogue, you're as brown as a berry and summer not started yet! By Jove, but it's fine to be home again, mother!"

Agatha's cheeks were crimson enough now, and her lips smiling. With the entrance of the brother she loved so dearly she lost the calm air of superiority which the two younger members of the family resented, and yet which is the elder sister's right to wear, it seems, by birth. France took Hugh's arm and hugged it affectionately. But he stood at attention and surveyed the youngest olive branch.

"Couldn't wait for you, old man," said Phil, waving his fork at him. "School's in a half-hour and we fellows can't be late."

For a moment Hugh was speechless.

"Old man!" he said then. "Old man!" He had not seen his brother in half a year, so he was unprepared for this grown-up

salutation. "Well, I never—" Then, "No apologies, old chap," with mock gravity. "I am going to reprimand severely the two old ladies for not falling into line, also. Here, France and Agatha—oh, pardon the slang, mother, do—New York is provocative of slang, honestly. It's so expressive. Old man!" turning on Phil again. "You've reached the mature age of eleven, haven't you?"

"Going on thirteen!" sputtered Phil, almost choking over a bit of sausage in his hurry to correct him. "Eleven, indeed!"

"Eleven, indeed! When was he twelve, mother?"

"Monday last," answered the mother, smiling.

"Monday—three days ago! Ha, ha, ha! Going on thirteen!" Then suddenly afraid that the little fellow might resent too much teasing, and anxious to have all things pleasant on this, his first morning home, he abruptly changed the conversation. "How's the breakfast, Phil?"

"Fine!" said Phil, enthusiastically. "Sue *can* make flap-jacks, no mistake about it, and mother's a bird at coffee. You're missing a whole lot, Hugh."

While they are at breakfast, let us take a look at this branch of the Lindsay family, for we are destined to know them better. The mother is a woman of medium build, with a sweet, round face. Her hair is silver-white and wavy, and retains some of the luxuriance of younger days. Her face is wrinkled, but every wrinkle is a crease of kindness—for if any face expresses human kindness in its truest sense, hers does. Her lips, her eyes, her very expression show forth such tender good nature as can only be seen on the countenance of a mother who has reared many children. And this one, like every other, is proud of all her little flock, but, perhaps—as mothers will, and do—her gaze lingered longest and most proudly on her eldest son—her darling.

He was not a handsome fellow by any means, though in her loving eyes a veritable Apollo. He was well set up, tall, loosely-knit, with a frame that spoke of great physical strength. His features were rugged, the nose large, the cheek-bones prominent, the jaws square and resolute. But though his lips were close and

stern in repose, when he spoke, some of his mother's sweetness lit up his blue eyes, and crept about the corners of his mouth, making him, indeed, his mother's son.

The girl Agatha was somewhat of a beauty—calm, serene, unruffled always, upright, and honest, whatever else her faults—and though by nature undemonstrative, she loved her sister and mother and brothers with all her heart. One trait she had not much to her credit—she was excessively careful in planning the ways and means of the household, and perhaps, with this, a little too fond of money, which is an uncommon thing in a girl of her age, and which made the mother shake her head occasionally, when this propensity seemed to run out of bounds. Not one among them could tell whether it was pure love prompted her to say "yes" when John Perry asked her to marry him. She liked him, indeed, but she was a girl who could set bounds to her liking. Perhaps, if the same John Perry had not been a rising young lawyer, with an assured income and a comfortable bank account, Agatha could have resisted the desire to take him for a husband.

I am not painting a very lovable character, am I? Before going on to the others I must do Agatha justice—and not leave you with a false impression. She had seen what lack of money led to—her parents, while fairly comfortable, had never been very rich—and she knew that lack of money drove Hugh to New York to the office of a real estate firm, rather than permitted him to continue the study of the paints and oils he loved. In fact—and she was not a sentimental girl—the tears had often started to her eyes when she came across some of his numerous sketches or drawings, and she thought of him delving away at leases and mortgages and reckonings, when all the time his heart was with his cherished ambition. Perhaps it was this first made Agatha careful in money matters, for Hugh was her beloved, and it hurt her to feel that he could not do as he wished—that it was for her sake and her mother's and France's and Phil's that he went away, and gave up his artistic dreams. Perhaps, too, she built a little on the wish that once married to John Perry she could help him—and them.

No such serious thoughts as these ever disturbed the sunny cheerfulness of France Lindsay's glowing, nut-brown face. She was quite the young lady, even though her mother claimed that at sixteen a girl is still too young to turn up her braid or wear long skirts. And since she had become too "high and mighty," as Phil termed it, for any kind of sport, except playing dominoes or pasting stamps on a rainy day, why she couldn't even *see* the famous house that "the fellows" and he meant to build for the summer vacation. He did not know that France had secretly resolved to capture his fort, and hold it, too. Aloud she might express her contempt for the wild romps she and Phil had known together, but her heart was still eager for them.

With much excuse and scraping of chair Phil rose to his feet now, and made ready for school. He had forgotten the disgust he had expressed for it when we were first introduced to him, and came, whistling lustily, into the dining-room to say good-by, his books slung across his arm, his hat pushed back on his head. Hugh laughed, and watched him leave them and run down the path to the gate. A mist came over his eyes. Was he thinking of his own childhood and the dreams he had had when he was twelve—the golden dreams of his youth that had never come true?

"How is the little lad getting on, mother?" he asked, turning to her.

"Splendidly, Father Austin says. Anxious to break bounds, sometimes, as is the case with most healthy boys, but after a good baseball game or a scrimmage—I think that is the word Father Austin used—he's as mild as can be."

"Imagine needing a baseball game to tone one down," laughed Agatha.

"It seems to me you need one to tone you up," said Hugh. "What is John Perry thinking of to let you lose the wild roses from your cheeks in such a fashion?"

"She has been staying in the house overmuch of late," said Mrs. Lindsay, looking at her girl with smiling lips. "No need to worry—Agatha is thoroughly healthy."

"Thank heaven!" said Agatha herself. "I couldn't stand being sick, mother."

"You'll have to come out with me now that I am home—I'll lead John Perry a dance," said Hugh, laughing. "I want to get into God's good sunshine and stretch my own limbs a bit before I go back to city life. A whole month of it, mother mine! Why, they won't know me."

"It must be very hard on you, Hugh, dear," said the mother, sympathetically, and a shadow fell across her face. "I do not feel happy when I think of you. It means so much lost out of your life—these years spent in business. I often wish father had been wiser—Uncle Eric might have done something for his children when he died. Eric is so rich—"

"Mother!" Hugh looked at her, and now there was no sweetness in his face—only sternness. "Don't say any more on that subject, please. Look at me—an independent, free and easy fellow, without a care in the world. A good business at my finger tips—one that I take an interest in—and a glorious ambition in the background to carry me out of myself when I get tired of everyday life. Besides that, I am able to help the dearest mother in the world, keep the little home together—give France and Phil an education— If that isn't enough to do a man proud—"

"Yes, dear," said the mother, almost humbly.

"By and by, when Agatha is married, and France has decided what vocation she means to follow, and Phil has started out for himself, you will come with me to Italy, and I'll show you sights that will astonish you!"

"You ambitious boy! Are you not satisfied to go alone?"

"I shall be going alone!" said the man—and now it was the boy in him that spoke. He put his arm about her as Phil might have done and hugged her. "I shall be going alone—for is not my mother part of me?"

The big knocker sounded loudly just then, and France jumped up to admit a tall, dark young fellow, who entered with the air of one thoroughly at home. He held out his hand to Hugh with an expression of genuine pleasure.

"Good morning, Hugh."

"Good morning, John."

"Get another plate, Sue," said Mrs. Lindsay, quickly. "We haven't finished breakfast, John—sit down with us."

"Thank you very much, mother—I have had mine. But I passed the post office on the way up, and Mrs. Sharpe asked me to give this to Hugh. Every one in town knows Hugh is home, it seems to me."

Hugh laughed, then took the telegram he handed him.

"I wonder who can be sending me a thing like this the very first day," he grumbled. "If it's that villain Wilson, I'll give him such a blowing up—Why, mother, what's the matter?"

He looked at her in complete astonishment—then at Agatha. Both were very pale. Even France's face was much concerned.

"Open it, open it!" cried John Perry. "Or you'll have them frightened out of their lives. Don't you know that telegrams are placed on the list with mice where women are concerned?"

"What nonsense!" said Hugh. "Mother, I thought *you* were sensible."

"I hope I am, dear," she answered. "But the sight of those things always fills me with dread. There," as Hugh tore it open, read it hurriedly, and glanced about him with startled eyes. "My boy! See, I knew! What is it, oh, what is it?"

"It is from Uncle Eric, mother," he answered, slowly. "Do not be scared, dear—it does not concern any one of us, thank God. Harry Lindsay is dead."

No one spoke after that. Mrs. Lindsay's eyes were riveted on his face, and he looked back at her mutely. Agatha, too, sat staring at her brother, and one could have heard a pin drop in the room. At last the silence in itself became frightening. Mrs. Lindsay stirred. "Dead!" she murmured, as if in a stupor. "Harry Lindsay dead? Are you sure, Hugh?"

"Here it is in plain words, mother," he answered, and his voice, too, sounded strange and queer. "'Harold Lindsay fell from horse Tuesday. Killed. Buried Saturday morning. Come at once. Eric Lindsay.' That reads like the truth, doesn't it?"

“Eric Lindsay is our uncle,” said Agatha, in an explanatory tone to her affianced. “And the Harry Lindsay spoken of was our first cousin—the heir to Uncle Eric’s wealth.” She spoke the last words very slowly—as if a new thought had struck her. John Perry looked at Hugh.

“I am sorry to be the bearer of such bad tidings,” he said, gravely. “And on your first morning home.”

“Will you go, Hugh?” asked Agatha, still in that slow, quiet tone.

“Poor fellow!” said Mrs. Lindsay. “He was just your age, Hugh—twenty-eight. I am so sorry—poor lad, poor lad!” Then she, too, looked at her son strangely. “Will you go, Hugh?”

He balanced the telegram on his finger a moment. His face was very grave, and his eyes cold and stern. For a moment he did not speak—but they knew he would, and they waited.

“Yes,” he said at last, rousing himself. “Yes—I’ll go, mother. To-day is Thursday. I’ll have to start this afternoon to be in time, for I don’t know how things connect after I get to Charlton.”

Mrs. Lindsay sighed in return. Had he said he would not go she had three or four arguments arranged ready to induce him to do so. But now that he agreed, she was sorrowful suddenly over the thought of the separation.

“I suppose you’ll have to,” she said, almost mournfully. “Your first day home, too, son. I haven’t had you to myself in six months, and to start away again means—”

“That I’ll be home for Monday’s breakfast, God willing,” he said. “Don’t grieve, mother. Poor Harry was my cousin—and if I did not go, it might look as if we held— Well, as if we felt that the old estrangement still existed. That would never do, dear. You know what Uncle Eric is.”

“Oh, you must go by all means—I’m only a foolish woman to say such things,” she answered, with a loving look that he returned in kind, for well they understood each other. “God help poor Harry’s mother, and comfort her to-day. May He, in His mercy, keep me from parting so with any of my children.”

Agatha had said no further word. Now, however, when her mother left the room, she ran her knife through the prongs of her fork one by one, in and out, looking at them meditatively.

"It means a good deal to you—this death," she said, in an earnest tone. "Are you thinking of all it does mean, Hugh?"

"Well, sister?" he asked, quietly.

"Harry Lindsay is dead, and Uncle Eric is such a crazy old—No; I don't mean that—he is so erratic, rather. You are the next one, according to his ideas."

Hugh's upper lip curled a trifle, and his blue eyes flashed. The past came before him very vividly just then, and the picture was not a pleasant one.

"We won't speak of such a terrible contingency," he said, with some bitterness.

"Terrible!" She opened her eyes at him in honest wonder. "Terrible, Hugh? The fact remains that Harry Lindsay dead means much to Hugh Lindsay living."

"You forget that there is one other who has prior claim on Uncle Eric," said Hugh.

"Which one? Oh, Laurence!" The corner of Agatha's mouth curled upward in a slight smile. "You know that *his* name is blotted out forever and ever from the annals of Lindsay Manor."

"Can you say so with certainty? In my opinion, he was the dearly beloved—and one can not forget so easily. If Uncle Eric has been hard toward him, it is because he is struggling against his own betrayed affection. At any rate we will waive this question, supposition, probability—anything you care to call it—right here and now, Agatha, and for good. Aunt Estelle would rather endow a home for indigent canary birds with her money than let it go to the Roman Catholic branch—while Uncle Eric is a stout, able-bodied, country-bred man of sixty-five, hale and hearty—and will live to be a hundred, I sincerely hope. I pray thee, my dear, let such talk rest between me and thee!"

He spoke jestingly now, but there was a deeper undercurrent to his tones, which told that he was altogether in earnest. Agatha

realized this, but she had not yet learned enough wisdom to drop a subject when the pursuing of it would only antagonize the listener.

"I don't care," she began, stubbornly. "You know Uncle Eric can't live forever, and you also know—"

Mrs. Lindsay entered just then. She caught the last words, and glancing from one to the other, read the look in Hugh's eyes. She understood at once what they had been talking of. Perhaps, in the fondness of her heart, a similar thought had found place for a moment. Only for a moment, however, as quickly gone as it came, for well she knew the obstacles in the way, obstacles almost impossible to surmount.

"Tut, tut," she said, somewhat testily. "Do not let us hanker after dead men's shoes, daughter. Weren't you speaking of Uncle Eric? I thought as much. I can tell by the disgusted expression on Hugh's face that he—"

"I wasn't disgusted, mother," said Hugh, cheerfully. "Agatha was just figuring—perhaps in a way that a fond sister may be permitted to figure. Don't do it any more, I ask you, dear—not even to yourself. Predict me a better fate than watching the breath of one old man."

Nothing could exceed the kindness in his voice. Probably, had John Perry not been present, Agatha would have smiled and changed the conversation. But under existing circumstances she rose from her chair and went to the window.

"You need not be afraid that I shall allude to the subject again," she said, proudly. "John, when you go to town will you see if you can get me the book you spoke of yesterday? By the way, brother, you may care to look at the morning paper. I hope you will find nothing in it to offend your tender sense of honor."

Hugh's temper was not angelic, but this little fling of Agatha's surprised him too much for a retort. He looked at his mother questioningly. She, good woman, put her finger across her lips, and, it must be confessed, winked at him—the tiniest wink in the world—still, it was a wink. Hugh understood. He followed her from the room, leaving the lovers together.

CHAPTER II.

THE LINDSAYS OF LINDSAY.

IN the great ballroom, which was opened only on the occasion of a marriage or a public festivity—not since the war on the occasion of a death—was laid the form of Harold Eric Lindsay, deceased nephew and adopted son of Eric Lindsay, of Lindsay Manor.

There were candles at his head and at his feet, and the room was shrouded in gloomy black, and the scent of flowers, mingling, overpowered one with their heavy breath, spilling their fragrance upon the shut in air until exhausted. And, dying, the blossoms were replaced by fresh ones, and sputtering the candles were taken out, and new ones put within the sockets of the tall candelabra.

Young Harold Lindsay, careless—more than careless, perhaps, as the circumstances of his death proved—had been none too great a favorite in Lindsay Manor, nor had there been much affection given him in all Lindsay itself, for he had taken his brother's place, and his brother had been loved indeed. Outside the Lindsay precincts he was hailed as a good comrade and a fine fellow. He lived the life of a man of leisure, an indolent, Southern gentleman, with nothing to do, and all his days to do it in. He had been what women called “gay” and what the world called “sporty,” but of that Eric Lindsay had known nothing until—now. Alone he died, and alone he lay here, in royal state, for the moment when custom and decency demanded that he be placed to rest with his fathers. Alone! And above all things, in all his pleasure-loving life, Harold Eric Lindsay could never bear to be alone!

There were strange and curious tales of the "young master's" double life—of his wild doings and reckless escapades, which accorded but ill with the actions of the rather reserved nephew with whom his Uncle Eric had come in contact. These stories got, God knew but how, to the old man's ears, and he had fallen into a passion like to be the death of him. But he was shrewd, nevertheless, and he could put two and two together, for all his erratic ways, and his two and two did not argue much in the dead man's favor. There were gambling debts and racing debts—and bills and *bills* and *BILLS*—all rushing in one upon the other. The old man's choler rose to such a pitch that he scarcely respected the presence of the dead in the quiet house—for Eric Lindsay had not much self-containment. Through his lawyer he made arrangements to pay all and everything—to clear the dead man's name and keep white the dead man's honor. And though it would cost him a steep and pretty sum, he remarked, savagely, that it was a cheap riddance of such an heir.

Which was a cruel thing to say of a dead man. There were those who thought so—for Uncle Eric had womenfolk about him, and womenfolk are kind at heart—especially toward the dead, whatever faults they find with one while alive. But only one had the courage to look the old man in the face and tell him so. We are coming to her—perhaps I am over-anxious to tell you of her—the one I love the best of all.

* * * * *

Away back in old England, at the time of that Reformation which never reformed anything but good into evil, as some one has wisely said, the name of Lindsay had stood high in the annals of the English court, and none of England's noble races was accorded more respect in all that great land. The Reformation saw them at the zenith of their glory. They began to die out, at that time, one by one, some of them martyrs to their faith, some of them exiles, some of them saints in very truth. But one among the younger branch fell away from the old belief. They were a proud race, of a proud strain. Their ancestors had done thus and so—no notable event transpired in the world's history in which

England took part, that the Lindsay line could not point haughty finger to some spot where Lindsay blood was spilled or Lindsay blood was honored. It behooved the faithless scion of a great, true race, to be proud of this also—that he had seen the error of his ways. His possessions increased and augmented with cloister spoils indeed, but with the new wealth came unwonted drinking and eating and hunting and playing—and each succeeding generation became larger and larger, and the estate smaller. That, however, did not prevent some one of the Lindsays coming to the fore when England's honor was concerned. A Lindsay was at Flanders until the peace of Ryswick; a Lindsay was leading the British forces when they captured Port Mahon. In time of peace a Lindsay had his seat in Parliament and was appointed to the highest office by George I. of England. The sons and grandsons followed in his footsteps.

In 1753, the then head of the Lindsay line, being somewhat more sentimental than the rest, looked about him. He had just been crossed in a love affair, and the shadow of the New World, big upon England's horizon, tempted him. He thought it would be a wonderful thing to remove his own particular root and branch to that land governed principally by England's king, and destined, in his opinion, to yield complete homage to the mother country. England held both the Carolinian States as colonies, for it was many years after 1729, when the king had bought out the proprietors, and the Earl of Lindsay was given royal grants and royal privileges when he settled. Here, on Carolina's shores, he planned for himself such a home as men do not have nowadays, since they erect only for present uses, not for future generations. He was wealthy enough to lavish his money upon the place, which became his hobby. He built and built, and was forever building. He acquired ground by grant, concession, or purchase, until even he was satisfied. And then he wrote to Lady Kitty Lindsay, his cousin thrice removed, and asked her to come to him and found, with him, a new race on the shores of this New World. He did not say he loved her—for in truth he did not—but it was his duty as a Lindsay to marry, and the Lindsays had never shirked a duty.

Lady Kitty came, and married him, and bore him one son ere she died, and was buried in the tomb he had erected to be the last resting place of all future Lindsays. Some said that she long and hopelessly had loved him, and that she died of a broken heart because he did not love her even after she became his wife. But he never remarried, and he mourned her sincerely.

His son lived through the troublous times of the Revolution. As a stanch loyalist he never believed it possible that a few insignificant handfuls of men could battle successfully against the Mistress of the Seas, and Lindsay Manor, during the British occupation of 1780 and 1781, was the scene of much festivity and almost royal gatherings. After that there were no further privileges granted to the Lindsay line, and in the light of the new America its star seemed eclipsed. During the Civil War the great estate had fallen into pitiable condition—neglected and miserable, weed-grown and unprofitable. But the dogged feudal strain still ran in the Lindsay veins. It was a tradition that the eldest-born of the house held his name and reckoning higher than life itself. Every eldest son so far, in the New World as in the Old, clung to the house of his birth with passionate devotion—so much so as to excite the derision of those who profited by bartering land and trading in merchandise in this continent of traffic.

Old traditions clung like leeches to Eric Lindsay of Lindsay Manor in South Carolina—so that one could scarcely believe him an American, born of American parentage.

He was the oldest of three brothers. They had grown to manhood with the mutterings of war in their ears, for the great conflict was brewing then that parted North and South. They looked at the grim old mansion, with its falling turrets and gables, its leaking roof and its moth-eaten, mildewed tapestries, its scores and scores of lazy, shiftless negro dependents, for their father had been as indolent as he was proud, and had made no effort to better himself or to acquire aught above the necessities of life. The fire of American restlessness stirred in their veins, so the two younger men left the Manor to the eldest son—who indeed owned it by inheritance, every stick and stone of it—and went out into the

world beyond the Carolina States to seek their fortune, leaving the elder with the ruined house, the profitless acres—with one rod of which he refused to part—and all the old-time traditions of Lindsay hugged close to his bosom—the traditions that had been the pride and bane of all their lives.

The youngest, Gerald, thoughtless and careless, being but twenty-one, did not wander far, but took to himself a wife and settled in the neighboring State of Georgia. When war did break out in earnest, its fever moved him, and leaving his wife and son, Laurence, to his brother Eric's care, he bravely marched away to stop a Yankee bullet. He never came home again, and his second son, Harold Eric Lindsay, was born after his hero-father's death.

Hugh Lindsay, the second brother, fared farther and more to his own welfare. He took part in the war also—that war which turned brother against brother—but he fought with the North, and came through unscathed. Then he, too, married, and settled down in a comfortable, if not wealthy home—he and his wife Margaret, and, as they came, their four children, of whom the Hugh we have met was the eldest.

Eric Lindsay, left alone, cast eyes about him as to how he could better his condition. Some time since, wandering through the Southern States, there had strayed a thrifty Hollander, with a pack upon his back, and a tongue as smooth as a well-oiled machine. He made his way North, where craft and industry abounded, but ever and always came back to the South again, and to Carolina—for it had first welcomed him, and he liked it. His eyes were bright and his cheeks rosy, and he stood upon his sturdy feet with all the strength of his sturdy peasant blood. He threw well in his bartering, for maid, wife, or widow a woman may be, but she has ever a kindly thought for the man who whistles his way through the world. It was this cheery pipe of his that, allied to his natural economy, laid the foundation of Richard Deykmann's fortune. It soon was a small fortune, indeed. He returned to Holland to marry, and he was careful that his comely wife brought him ample dowry as well as good health and good looks, for he had ever an eye to the main chance.

Explanations are tedious, I have no doubt, to those of my readers who dislike them. Have patience. It would be a sorry thing to tell you that Eric Lindsay of Lindsay Manor was a very rich man, without telling you how he became so.

Richard Deykmann had one child, a girl, Estelle. He meant to leave her splendid wealth, as wealth went then. But with the Civil War his great opportunity came. He saw the chance and took it—and the money he accumulated surprised even himself—there was so much of it. Honestly earned, too, every penny, for he was an honest man.

After the Rebellion his ideas expanded just a trifle. He had long coveted some of the Lindsay property, but he might as well have cried for the moon. He could afford a few luxuries, he could loosen up the purse-strings a bit. "It was no longer necessary," he said, in his quaint and homely phrase, "to pull up his knees when the bed was too short—he could now afford one full length."

But there was one thing all the magnitude of his money could not buy—entrance into the society in which his young daughter craved to shine. The People had ever in remembrance the pedler's pack and the cheery whistle that had been the foundation of the Deykmann fortune. And, as is generally the case, those were just the things he desired them to forget. Trying to negotiate for the Lindsay acres, a thought struck him. What bargain, then, that the heir of the Lindsays made with the one-time pedler no one ever knew—but he asked the hand of Estelle Deykmann in marriage.

The girl had no fault to find with this match of her parents' making. Young Eric was handsome and proud and stately—such a lover as she had never dreamed of having. And blueness of blood being above all things the one desirability in her eyes, she gave her hand, and her heart, also, to the descendant of the Earls of Lindsay, the proudest men in England.

Thenceforth the Carolina wilderness began to blossom like a rose. The stately mansion was repaired, the stately grounds cleared of rubbish, white overseers and servants secured, and the whole place put into spick and span condition. Fields of cotton and barley and corn and wheat were planted. The woods of wal-

nut and chestnut and oak were left untouched as far as possible, for Eric Lindsay's heart was in them. What advice of his father-in-law's that he thought good or sensible he took, but when it hinged upon anything ancient about the Manor he laughed and followed his own bent. He prospered. It was doubtful if he loved his wife one whit more, or as much, as his grand home and its now beautiful surroundings. At first the newness of the wealth that had come with her made him grateful and tender. With the old pedler's death, and that of his good wife, which occurred some years after his marriage, this wealth increased enormously. They had no one to leave it to but their daughter Estelle, and their niece, Mildred, who was then but a baby, and who received from them her portion. Just in all things, they gave the little girl all to which she was entitled.

On the whole the Lindsays got along remarkably well. Estelle Deymann, despite her great fondness for birth and breeding, or because of it, I should say, made Eric Lindsay a good wife. They were childless, which was their only regret. Mildred Powell had grown up into a tall and stately girl. Lindsay Manor had been her home from early childhood, and she had acquired some of its pride from constant association. If Estelle Deymann ever remembered that it was her wealth brought this property to glorious blooming, she looked at the result with deep content. She was the wife of the most respected man in the county, of the man in whose veins ran the bluest of blood, who could point back to ancestors that had really lived and moved and had their being, and whose pictures, hanging in the long gallery, filled her with awe. Especially when she came to her own portrait at the end of the line, and gazed at the somewhat too fresh-faced young woman, who, did she live in England, might be Countess Lindsay. She rolled the title over and over under her tongue—it was a toothsome morsel, and without a shade of dissatisfaction in its sound. For Eric Lindsay paid her such honor and respect as she could not have had from one in her own station, and she deferred to him with an awe of his authority that he certainly would never have received had he married in *his* station. She had faults, indeed,

and much she lacked in many things, but after almost thirty years of married life these little slips of tongue and deportment no longer made her husband wince as in the earlier days.

He had taken Gerald Lindsay's eldest boy, Laurence, as his own, and fully intended making him his heir. He loved him in his way, and gave him full liberty. It was an unwise liberty—the boy was spoiled, encouraged, petted. And when he grew up to manhood his will crossed his Uncle Eric's in many things. Put tow to flame and what is the result? Inevitable. There were such bickerings and such quarrelings as made the Manor a veritable babel often. There were little murmurings all the time, and mighty storms of anger, for Laurence Lindsay was a heedless, merry, graceless scamp, who spent money with fingers wide apart, and his ways threatened ill for the future of the house. It ended one day as all had predicted it must end. Laurence Lindsay left his home forever, and the old lord of it, cursing him, packed bag and baggage after him. And he took young Harold Eric then, who was wiser than Laurence had been, in that he kept his spendthrift ways to himself—nor did Eric Lindsay hear of them until his sudden ending, when all was revealed, and the old man had another bitter hour.

He bethought him then of the widowed Margaret and her children—who had never come near him to beg or to borrow, and acting on sudden impulse, he sent the telegram to Hugh. There had been estrangement between old Eric and that dead brother. He had done worse, in his eyes, than faring into the world heedless of old traditions—worse even than fighting against the State that bore him. He had married a Catholic—and the Lindsays, since the time of that wonderful Reformation, had ever been stanchest Church of England! Nor was that all. His children, his boys—the horror of it!—were reared in the Catholic faith. Nor did his debasement end here. He, himself, returned to the Church of his fathers.

There was the picture of a Lindsay in the gallery who had been a holy bishop, a man who, if not a saint, had been the most revered of his age. There was another picture, too, of a splendid,

noble-browed cavalier, and there was a story about him in one of the yellowed parchment volumes, kept as sacred in the Lindsay treasure-vault. He was Gerard Lindsay, who had given his life for that priceless gift—his faith. Nay, more, he had seen his little children slaughtered—three of them—in order to save the life of one poor hunted Irish priest, who, fleeing, bore within his breast the body of Christ. That was in the time of Father Persons and Father Campian, the noble Jesuits who came from Rome to say Mass in London, the time of Lord Grey, the cruel lord-lieutenant, the tyrant of Ireland, the time when even his noble birth could not outweigh the fact that this Lindsay was a Catholic. For it said even more in these parchment volumes. It told how this same Gerard Lindsay stood with arms folded across his breast singing the Te Deum, while the soldiers took aim and fired and wounded him in many places, trying to see how they could injure before they killed him. And reading such stories as these occasionally, Uncle Eric's hot blood stirred within him, and he did not feel, for the moment, so bitterly toward his brother Hugh.

Aunt Estelle was different. She had no such toleration in her veins. With pure peasant toughness she held fast to her hatred of the Babylonian Woman and all her pomps and works and followers, as she had been taught in her rigidly Methodist childhood. And once when Hugh Lindsay came home to the Manor on a visit, she said some things to him about this faith which she had never understood. He did not answer her, because she was a woman. But he spoke to his brother when he found him alone, and he said enough to put him into a passion. And Uncle Eric in a passion was none too careful of others. He retorted hot and furiously. The consequences were that Hugh Lindsay's visit terminated abruptly, and that there had been no further communication between the two families—not even when the younger brother died.

Until now.

CHAPTER III.

HIS OWN PEOPLE.

UP in her pleasant boudoir, on the morning of the day before the funeral of her nephew, Mrs. Eric Lindsay reclined upon her satin couch, a vinaigrette placed on a small table close at her elbow. She was resting languidly among the many-hued cushions, and did not seem much interested in the black clothes her maid was spreading out before her—though sometimes one's look belies what is passing through his or her mind. She had given word that she was to be denied to all callers, for that, under the circumstances, she considered the proper thing to do. “Mrs. Lindsay is prostrated by grief, and can not be seen,” was the formula. So kind visitors left their cards and condolences, and none of the bereaved family put in an appearance except “Miss Mildred” when the one who called happened to be of more than usual importance.

There were three women gathered about the couch on which the languid mistress of the Manor was lying—Aunt Hannah (housekeeper and general factotum, who had been so long Mrs. Lindsay’s right hand that she could not make up her mind to do anything without her), Julie, her maid, and Jane, the seamstress. The latter held up each separate garment for inspection, and for a thoroughly fatigued lady, Mrs. Lindsay was rather critical. After all, she decided mentally, black would not be unbecoming to her fair hair and youthful features—though it made one look *so* old, and at her age a woman must be *so* careful! She really was not old in appearance by any means. As for vanity—well, she was still alive.

A sharp tap at the door made her start nervously and bring the salts to her nose. A tall, erect, handsome man, with snow-white

hair and mustache, entered the room. It was the master of Lindsay Manor. Patrician, aristocrat, were stamped in every fine line of his face. He glanced about him quickly—at the three servants, and at his wife, as he closed the door behind him.

“I want to speak to you, Estelle,” he said. “Are you busy?”

“Only seeing to my mourning,” she answered in tired tones. “Leave them on the chairs for a while—you may all go.”

Eric Lindsay walked to the window and stood looking out of it, with his hands behind him. Time had not softened his proud face—rather made it more severe. He had the Lindsay eyes—a peculiar glinty shade of blue, something like cold steel, and he carried all the haughtiness of his race in his bearing and in his manner. His voice, too, had an imperious note in it, as if its owner had never asked a favor, but was used to commanding them. Once the room was clear of the servants he turned to his wife.

“I have just received two telegrams,” he said, curtly. “One is from the Governor, and one from Hugh.”

“The Governor?” asked Mrs. Lindsay, curiously.

“Yes; he will attend the interment to-morrow.”

“The Governor will?” in surprised tones. A quiver of exultation shot across her face. Only last year she had attended a reception in Columbia, at which she saw how ceremony and homage waited hand in hand on the great man who was her husband’s friend. And he was coming to the Manor! At that moment Estelle Deykmann experienced one of those spasms of gratitude she often felt toward her husband for marrying her.

“This is a gloomy occasion, I admit,” went on Eric Lindsay. “But still I’d like the place to look its best. If you have any order to give to make it so, give it at once. He will probably come back here after the interment.” He glanced at another telegram he held. “Listen—this is from my nephew, Estelle. ‘Fortunately was home when news came. Will leave at once.’ Now, what do you think of that? Young beggar! Does he mean to insinuate—”

“He might not have been able to come had he been at business. I believe he is in business, isn’t he?” ventured Aunt Estelle. She did not say this without result. Eric Lindsay stiffened, and his

heavy brows met. Occasionally his wife jarred very much on his finer feelings.

“Business, did you say? Yes, if you call a lawyer a *business* man. To my mind it is a good thing to be a lawyer—especially for him. It may fit him for a higher position.”

He spoke significantly. Mrs. Lindsay bit her lip and raised her smelling salts to her nose again, delicately.

“Is there no other way but that?” she inquired.

“What—that he get Lindsay? There’s no other way I can see. I flatter myself that the old house and the old name are as dear to you now as they are to me—you wouldn’t have it pass into a stranger’s hands?”

“Too bad, too bad,” she said, sighing. “Since the Reformation there has never been a Romanist—”

She paused. She was scarcely up in the history of the Reformation or of Romanism. But just then she remembered that the most famous heroes of her husband’s line had been Catholics, and was silent. “He is not one of us,” she finished, suggestively.

Uncle Eric smiled in a sarcastic manner.

“We’ll make him one,” he said. “Look around you, Madam Lindsay—think of what the place is, and what it has to back it. I tell you there is no man living wouldn’t embrace Confucianism itself to get it.”

The puny household goods of this poor earth of ours assume vast proportions when minds are much engrossed with them. So it was with Eric Lindsay. Mrs. Lindsay didn’t know what Confucianism was, so she kept silent and sniffed at her vinaigrette several times. Whatever it might happen to be, she hoped no Lindsay would ever belong to anything so outlandish.

“I wouldn’t care so much,” she said at last, plaintively, “but Hugh’s father was so very strange and distant—he had no regard for us at all. And his wife— You know yourself, Eric, she never thought it necessary to come to see us, or to correspond with us, or—or anything. I suppose it wasn’t worth while. They had nothing to expect when Harry was alive.” She spoke somewhat bitterly, and the old man’s face hardened. “Like mother, like

son, Eric. Will you care for this nephew, do you think? Can he expect—”

“Judging from his telegram he expects nothing,” said Eric Lindsay. “At least one thing my brother Hugh never could do—toady. He wouldn’t humble himself to the king of England, and from all accounts his wife is of the same mold. What his son may be—well, let it rest at that. God knows he can’t be worse than that idiotic—”

A soft knock interrupted his harsh qualification of the dead man downstairs. In answer to Mrs. Lindsay’s permission, Mildred Powell entered. She was a very tall girl, fair and stately, with a refinement and an air of good breeding that her elder cousin lacked. Mrs. Lindsay was proud of this girl’s pride and of her stateliness, of her chilly hauteur, and quiet, dignified reserve. The large eyes were deeply violet and heavily fringed, the full lips were red and warmly molded—but both eyes and lips were too cold in expression for their coloring.

She was followed almost instantly by a slim figure barely up to her shoulder—a girl in every way her direct opposite. Small and daintily formed, with fine little limbs, and a head over which tumbled bronze curls in riotous confusion. A proud little head, set on a throat splendidly formed for such a young creature. The contour of throat and chin and lips and nose and brow was exquisite. Her eyes were brown, with gold glints in them like her hair, and her eyebrows were penciled straight lines above them, giving character to what the superficial observer might designate a childish face. Her little red mouth was made for smiling, though it could droop like a chidden baby’s at a harsh word. Everything about her showed life and vitality, change and movement. Her countenance was like a mirror, in which were reflected the thoughts of her soul. From rage to tenderness, from laughter to tears, was but a step with her. There was something in Eric Lindsay’s proud eyes when he looked at her that never came into them turned on any other living creature. Perhaps his heart could have told a story, for Gertrude Waring’s mother in her youth had been just such a girl as her daughter was now.

There had been a romance in his life—a romance very few knew of, and sometimes the sweetness of what might have been crept into his cold, suspicious heart. Gertrude had been brought up at Lindsay, and educated as her own sweet will dictated, for the master of the Manor never forbade her anything. And this one weakness of his made his wife very irritable at times. It annoyed her, and she was wont to make stinging remarks to the little orphan, who, it must be confessed, did not receive them meekly.

“Did you take a look at the guest-rooms before you came up, Mildred?” asked Madam Lindsay, once more applying the bottle to her nose.

“Yes, Aunt Estelle.” Mrs. Lindsay was “Aunt Estelle” to both girls by reason of her greater age. “Everything is in good order. When is Hugh coming?”

“Any moment now,” said Eric Lindsay. “I have received a telegram from him.”

“And you—Gertrude? What have you been doing with yourself all morning?”

Gertrude opened her big brown eyes in amusement. She understood the madam well enough to know that she was in one of her aggressive tempers.

“Why, Aunt Estelle, what have I done to you now? I think Mildred is able to look around one or two rooms without my assistance—if that is what you mean. You know I just hate details.”

“I know it, indeed. It would be better for you if you were less flyaway and more practical. It disturbs me to think—”

“It need not!” retorted the girl a little sharply. “Practical, indeed! What is practical, my dear aunt, is always tiresome—and *often* vulgar!”

She delivered this shaft with flashing eyes, and walked to the window. Mildred sat down on the taboret at Mrs. Lindsay’s feet.

“She has been in the room beside Harold’s coffin,” she said. “That is Gertrude’s way, Aunt Estelle—a bad way, maybe, but we can’t change it. She has cried her eyes out over him all this

morning—fixing flowers here, straightening a candle there, and praying until I think her knees are worn out.”

Had there been a shade of tenderness in the cold voice the words might have sounded kind. She, in truth, did not mean them unkindly. She stated the facts as facts—in somewhat of a wondering tone, if anything. Gertrude turned from her contemplation of the outside world to look at the group.

“Don’t talk like that, Mildred—as if you had no more feeling than—than a wooden doll!” She clenched her little hands passionately. “I can’t understand you—any one of you,” she cried, her voice trembling. “There he lies dead, who three days ago was Lindsay’s future lord and master! Only three days ago! Everything to you—everything! And how you have changed! No; I won’t hush, Uncle Eric—I’m just going to say it. He is dead, and none so kind as to give him even a thought—”

“Please do not continue,” interrupted Mrs. Lindsay with dignity. “Would you instruct your elders in their duty, miss? We feel as sorry for Harry as you do. The idea! I’d like to know what good it would do him if we sat crying over him in your foolish fashion, making ourselves ill and wearying ourselves to death?”

Gertrude opened her lips to reply, then shut them quickly. The tears came, and she turned to the window again to hide them. Eric Lindsay bent his steel-blue eyes upon her.

“I trusted Harold Lindsay while he lived, Gertrude,” he said. He never justified himself to any living being for any action he saw fit to do, save to Gertrude—and strangely enough she was the only one failed to notice it. “Gave him my full trust—and he betrayed me. His brother (whose name I have forgotten) was at least honest and above board with me, for all his faults and follies. The man lying below shall have every honor that, as a dead Lindsay, he is entitled to—every jot and tittle. But beyond this I will not go.”

“Gertrude wants her *prie dieu* taken downstairs,” said Mildred again, in her perfectly even tones—tones that Gertrude, in a sudden fit of rebellious rage, felt that she hated. “I do not like to

mention it, Uncle Eric, but you should forbid it. She will exhaust herself. She," Mildred put up her hand to cover a yawn, "prays too much as it is."

Anger dried the last tear in Gertrude's eyes.

"Do you think my praying harms the dead?" she burst out, passionately.

"Peace, peace!" cried the master of the Manor. "I will have peace. You mean well, and no one shall interfere with you or your praying. But it strikes me that you overdo it."

The tears in the girl's eyes had touched Mrs. Lindsay. While she abhorred "idolatry" and all its practises, and in softer moods felt really sorry for this "benighted" little member of her household, she would never, by look or word, do anything to disturb Gertrude's simple piety.

"At your age, my child, one is apt to attach significance to such things," she said, relapsing into her most languid manner. "When you are older you will understand."

"Never any more than I understand to-day," she said quietly. "If you—"

"Let us quit this," said Uncle Eric. "I am not in the mood for discussion. Please try to be less sentimental, Miss Gertrude, and don't worry about that dead body downstairs, which has neither sense nor feeling."

Gertrude folded her arms across her breast, as was her habit when very serious, and stood there facing him. "I am no sentimentalist—nor have I a single care for that dead body downstairs, uncle, except that it is the shell that once held a soul. Oh, Uncle Eric, it frightens me to think where that soul is now. To think that perhaps—"

She was interrupted by a shrill scream. Mrs. Lindsay sat up among her cushions.

"Go away, go away," she cried. "You will have me all upset. I can't stand it. Go away, every one of you, and send Aunt Hannah to me at once. I never, never, never in my life saw such an inconsiderate, reckless girl! You have no more regard or feeling or thought for a person's nerves than—"

What else she said Gertrude did not hear, for she made her way to the door quickly and vanished.

* * * * *

Hugh Lindsay left Westport for New York City late that afternoon, and caught the midnight express from Jersey City. It meant a tedious ride, and at heart he was an easy-going chap, who disliked traveling very much. This sudden journey rather vexed him. He had earned his holiday, and had made up his mind to have four weeks of indolent ease before starting out to the battle again.

It was a jaded and weary man that reached Charleston Friday. He hadn't slept a wink—he never could in a train, and he felt cross and irritable and much disgusted with life. But he found a good room at one of the best hotels, and after a hearty meal and a rest, he felt more like the Hugh Lindsay he knew every day. Before going to bed he made all inquiries concerning trains and connections for the next morning. It was part of his plan not to spend a night at Lindsay Manor. He had been a mere boy when his father came back from that last memorable visit, and in his heat of passion said many things better left unsaid—things which, to the listening lad, seemed to bear principally on their religion, which his Uncle Eric hated. He remembered the term "Romish marriage," and as he grew up realized its significance. He had a rugged pride of his own at the bottom of his genial, happy disposition—a pride as unlike the famous Lindsay pride as dark from day. There were depths to his nature which no one among those he loved ever knew existed. They were depths which some privileged soul—a soul the counterpart of his own, might enter into and wonder at and love him for. The very thought that any one at Lindsay Manor might consider him a possible candidate for his uncle's favor galled him beyond endurance. Yet such a summons as he had received could not well be ignored without deadliest insult. He planned to make his visit as brief as possible, however. He would leave Charleston for the little way station, Kentboro, early the next morning, and would doubtless find

some sort of conveyance to take him to Lindsay. He meant to engage it for the return trip the same evening. He would then spend the night at Charleston and take morning train for home.

All this he planned to his own satisfaction as he turned comfortably on his pillow. And as Hugh Lindsay never planned anything in his life without doing his very best to carry it out, he thought he could well manage this new proposition.

Rising at a very early hour, he engaged the same room for that evening, and took train for Kentboro. Even after reaching the little out of the way station he found that there was a fifteen mile drive before him, so that he did not get to Lindsay until ten o'clock. Eric Lindsay had given him up altogether. He had gone over the time table carefully, and by exact computation had figured that, allowing for all possible delay, Hugh should have reached the Manor the previous evening—which, had Hugh come on direct, he certainly could have done.

The master of Lindsay and his wife, with Mildred and Gertrude, were gathered in the morning-room when the butler entered with Hugh Lindsay's card. Uncle Eric took it, glanced at it with cold eyes, and handed it to his wife.

“Your nephew is downstairs, Estelle. Shall we receive him here?”

“We are all together now,” said Mrs. Lindsay. “Let him come up, Eric.”

“Very well. Bring Mr. Lindsay to us,” said Uncle Eric. Hugh Lindsay, waiting in the drawing-room, stiffened a little when the servant came to him. A haughty smile curved his lips and his head went a bit higher. He was of the Lindsay blood—and it always desired and expected ceremony.

Uncle Eric had not thought to see such a nephew as the tall, high-bred, courteous man who entered the room now, his light traveling coat across his arm, hat in hand. There was a certain masterfulness about him that rather startled the old despot. Mildred, turning from the window, bent cold eyes upon the newcomer. She was very chilling—more like a statue than a woman as she stood there, looking at the man who was to be, in all probability,

the next master of Lindsay. The dark, golden-glinting eyes of little Gertrude sought him also.

"My, what a big nose he has!" she thought regretfully. "Harry had such a nice, straight nose."

Aunt Estelle was doing her very best to appear at her ease, but as the stranger's glance swept around the dainty room, somehow she felt insignificant. His eyes—a steely-blue, like her husband's, seemed to pierce through her. There was something in them which was not all Lindsay.

"You are—Hugh?" asked Uncle Eric, in a hesitating tone. The cold smile deepened—it crept from lips to eyes now.

"I have the honor," he returned, bowing, "to be Hugh Lindsay, at your service. You, I presume, are my Uncle Eric?"

It was cool greeting between people of one blood. Strange to say, Uncle Eric was rather pleased than otherwise. He held out his hand, and the younger man took it gravely.

"This is your Aunt Estelle."

Mrs. Lindsay bowed. Her nephew bowed.

"My cousin, Miss Powell," she said.

"Ugh!" thought the young man. "Cold icicles down one's back are fire to this—"

"My ward, Miss Waring," said Eric Lindsay. The sweet face turned to meet his glance had red lips smiling in friendly fashion.

"Welcome, Cousin Hugh!" she said, holding out her two small hands to him. "I am glad—so glad to see you!"

She looked as if she meant it. His thoughts flew back to France, the brown-faced little sister at home, and his heart grew all the gentler toward this young creature for the comparison.

"Thank you," he said, and his full tones took on a tenderer note. "Thank you, cousin. It is good to hear a friendly word."

The master of the Manor gave his wife a quick glance.

"This is no joyous occasion," he cut in, almost surly. "You must pardon us that we have but little speech to spare. We are much disturbed—"

"It is mine to pray for pardon," said Hugh, turning to his

uncle hastily. "I meant no offense—but Miss Waring reminded me of home. I have a little sister somewhat like her."

"You have but the one sister?" asked Mrs. Lindsay, graciously.

"No, madam, I have two—and one younger brother."

"Your mother—is she in good health?" asked Eric Lindsay now, conscious of his lack of manners.

"My mother?" They were not well enough acquainted with him to note the change in his voice when he spoke that dear name. "My mother is in the best of health indeed, thank God."

The visitor seemed to have the quality of rendering them all uncomfortable. Here was no man conscious of the master of Lindsay's power, or the extent of the mistress of Lindsay's wealth. Rather an aristocrat conferring favor by his mere presence.

"It is the New York bravado," said Uncle Eric to himself. But there was something besides bravado in this self-contained, self-repressed young man, with the honest face. Uncle Eric liked him, and immediately checked himself angrily for doing so.

The funeral guests were beginning to arrive, and the ladies withdrew to dress. Harry Lindsay's mother, who lived at Kentboro, was prostrated by the shock, and unable to attend the services, or to bid her boy a last farewell. But the best people of the county were there, and prominent among them the Governor of the State. Uncle Eric watched his nephew's face when he was introduced to the gray-haired man who was chief executive of South Carolina. To his infinite satisfaction he could perceive naught but cool composure in his bearing, touched with just a shade of deference, which sat not ill upon him in conversing with a man so much older than himself.

It was no time for character study, however. Hugh Lindsay was ushered into the gloomy ballroom, and there, under the dim glow of the candles, for the first time and the last, he looked upon his cousin. A rather handsome face his had been, he concluded, judging from the cold comeliness of the dead countenance lying there so peacefully. A sudden rush of pity for the flame of the young life quenched, for the mother bereaved, struck at Hugh

Lindsay's heart, and he fell upon his knees—regardless of what eyes were on him in haughty disapproval, regardless that the assembled guests were staring at him, some in astonishment, some in amusement, his Aunt Estelle's in sudden anger.

"You have the courage of your convictions, young man," said the Governor when Hugh stood beside him again.

Hugh did not know what he meant at first, and stared at him blankly. Then he colored a little.

"I am not afraid to do what I think right because of human respect," he said, almost haughtily. "I fear no man."

"What a pepper-pot!" thought the Governor. "He's kin to my lord Eric without a doubt. A goodly fellow, though—and by Jove, I like him!" Aloud he said:

"You are not alone—you have one little compatriot, your Miss Waring, I see. But there is Parson Downes. Have you ever heard Parson Downes? People always send for him here to preach funeral sermons—he is so comfortable," with a twinkle in his eye. "Listen to Parson Downes, young man, and learn. I, too, have imbibed of oratorical knowledge at this Pierian spring."

Hugh, at another time, would have smiled at comparing the lean, stoop-shouldered, gaunt man in clerical garb to aught so idyllic. But different sentiments were working in his breast. He looked about him. His Uncle Eric stood erect, unmoved, beside him; his Aunt Estelle, shrouded in black, her face covered, sat at the foot of the casket. Gertrude alone was weeping, very quietly and unobtrusively. Mildred acted as chatelaine for the nonce, bowing in her stately, unemotional way to the men and women who crowded about her, and extending to them a welcoming hand. And the people who came were so mildly interested—almost bored, Hugh thought.

"What a scene this is," he said to himself, restlessly. "Not a soul seems to be impressed by the awful majesty of death—not one of them seems to realize how close we are to the great shadows of the other world. This is awful. Or am I strait-laced?"

The parson, standing at the head of the casket, cleared his throat several times, and began to speak in a slow and solemn

voice. Hugh listened. Such eulogy of the dead, such a summing up of manifold virtues, such a paragon of all the good in the world had been, according to his version, the dead Harold Eric Lindsay. He painted a touching picture of the blessed angels waiting with outstretched hands to bear a kindred soul into the arms of the heavenly Father. In spite of himself, Eric Lindsay, standing among his family, felt his face twitch a little when he heard all this—but Hugh Lindsay listened and was glad. For in his heart, simple despite its knowledge of the world, he believed the good and tender things that were said of his dead cousin, and he prayed God to have mercy on him, and grant him the eternal rest the clergyman pictured.

He found himself walking, grave and quiet, between his uncle and the governor, for the dead Lindsays were carried to the great family vault, followed on foot by their kindred and friends. According to custom it was Hugh Lindsay's right to be chief pall-bearer, but he had arrived so late that all arrangements had been made without him, and he would not permit them to be altered then. He had time to notice more fully the demeanor of the man whose heir was being taken to his last rest. And he marked him down as cold and unfeeling, for here was no sorrow, no regret. Hugh thought of the afternoon with longing. He would be glad to escape from this chilling atmosphere—glad to get back to the dear home in Westport, to the smiling faces, the hearty voices, the loving eyes, the gentle care. He realized now, in all its fulness, what "mother" means to a home. She is the love of it, the heart of it, the joy of it. So has it ever been—so will it ever be.

CHAPTER IV.

"MY LADY APRIL."

SEEING Hugh Lindsay in his own home, no one would dream of calling him other than a loving son, easy-going, and a little careless, for he threw off restraint and conventionality once he reached its sacred precincts, and was a boy again, bubbling over with boyish nonsense, and full of pranks that, viewed with the eyes of an outsider, set strangely upon him.

He could don the man though, easily, and in the full pride of manhood he walked now between two of the greatest personages in South Carolina. His uncle looked at him with half unwilling approbation, for though Lindsay, in all its loveliness, was spread before him, showing a vista that might well have tempted the wandering glances of one less self-contained, he never for an instant forgot that this was no time for sightseeing. But the approving light did not rest long on the older man's face—it died away almost as soon as it flickered up. Eric Lindsay was no longer young in years, and could scarcely change the nature now that those past years had embittered. Behind him lay two sore experiences. The first, in Laurence Lindsay, he had brought upon himself, for even as a boy he was erratic, fanciful, hot-tempered, gifted, a little unprincipled, perhaps, since his uncle had brought him up to be a law unto himself—without fear of God or man. And when his wilful disposition wreaked itself upon that uncle's head, when he claimed as a right the privileges that were his only by his uncle's favor, trouble arose, leading to the open split between them. And yet Harold Lindsay had been the worse of the two—and this the old man told himself sourly enough as they turned from the great gray vault where his body was laid at last,

and the guests, all but those favored people who were to lunch with the Governor, got into their carriages and were driven away.

“This one will be like the others,” he muttered to himself, as they walked slowly back again—almost as slowly as they had come. “just like the others. A sweetly smiling face to the rich old uncle, and a frown when his back is turned. I know them all—a precious pack, indeed !”

So far he had had no cause to murmur at the sweetness of his new nephew’s smile, for Hugh but addressed him when he had to, maintaining a grave reserve which might mean much—or nothing, thought the old man in his bitterness. There was none of his blood to care for him. His wife cared? Yes; but she had reason to, he thought, proudly. Mildred was an outsider—there was no love lost between them, and lately, indeed, from her demeanor and from the glances he had encountered fixed upon him at odd times, he felt that the girl actually hated him. Little Gertrude was too young, too babyish, too frivolous, and her tongue too sharp to invite the serious affection he could give. Somehow his heart went out to this grave young fellow with the honest eyes, and only for the band of steel which his wealth had placed about that heart to restrain its natural impulses, Hugh Lindsay might have had a different opinion concerning his uncle than the one now forming in his brain.

Whether it was interest in him as a stranger, or as the heir in prospective of the richest man in the county, that made the Governor so friendly to Hugh none could say. He was a South Carolinian himself—a well-bred, well-read, far-seeing man—and perhaps there was something in the glint of Hugh’s eyes that reminded him of past youth and early fire. At any rate his cordiality awoke the genial warmth natural to the young man’s manner, and the conversation became intimate. Hugh knew nothing of local subjects, but he was in touch with general ones, and on these he could speak with force and emphasis.

“I told you once before that you had the courage of your convictions,” said the Governor. “I’m beginning to believe it even more fully than I did.”

"I have no sympathy with vacillation or hesitancy. They should have no place in a man's day."

"That assertion is too sweeping," remarked Eric Lindsay, slowly. "Always, at some period in a man's life, there come before him two roads which give him pause. I do not call that vacillation when he stops to consider."

"Nor I. Yet he who hesitates is lost, and there is always one road more right than the other, narrowed down to its finest distinctions."

"More right? Suppose it is a personal question—the question of one's heart-interests, and the hopes of a great family?"

Hugh shrugged his shoulders.

"I would not want to deny my family—but heart-interests would take the lead with me. Kind hearts, they say, are more than coronets. After all, Uncle Eric, what is family?"

The old man stared at him as if he had uttered the rankest heresy. He drew his fine form erect, and his eyes fairly emitted sparks—as steel does when it is struck.

"What is family? That question sounds ill on the lips of a Lindsay."

"No more than on the lips of any other man. Birth is but an accident at best—an honest man is the noblest work of God. I had rather be that than be a scoundrel, though the bluest of blue blood flowed within my veins."

"Oh, of course," said Uncle Eric. "I did not mean it in that way. So far, thank God, there have been no scoundrels of Lindsay blood."

He spoke hotly. The cool look on Hugh's face enraged him.

"We are begging the question, uncle," said the young man. "I do not mean to be personal—I am only talking of people in general. In truth it would be a strange thing to mention Lindsay in the same breath with dishonor."

"I believe we were talking about choosing the paths that one should follow, were we not?" asked the Governor, courteously. "I remember an incident that occurred when I first started to practise law, after taking my degree. A case came up—an em-

bezzlement. The man was of high family—there were fine chances for the lawyer who undertook the task of clearing him, for the burden of proof lay with the defendant. It was one of those knotty cases that a lawyer loves to tackle, and I was indeed tempted. It meant great opportunities for me, the more as I was positive that I could make a success of the thing. But unfortunately I happened to know that the man was guilty. I refused to work on it, though I think it was the sorest moment of my life—the moment I declined. Yet I have not been sorry. Another lawyer undertook it—and won. It meant a great deal to him also—it assured his future. But the strangest part of all is to come. I will not weary you with details, but at the last election that lawyer was my opponent—and the thing that helped most to kill his chances was the case he fought to prove a guilty man innocent.”

“That was queer,” said Hugh, much interested.

“It only goes to show on what forgotten incidents much depends. He had completely blotted that occurrence from his mind, but it was revived, hauled over the coals, retold, rehashed—really made a hundred per cent. worse than it was. Had the shoe been on my foot, I would have lost the election.”

“Ah, well, it hardly seems fair to hold one single false step up before a man’s eyes—there is so much in a life to make one choose the wrong path,” said Eric Lindsay.

Hugh raised a curious glance to his uncle’s face. Was this man one to confess error or regret? Was there room for aught but love of money and Lindsay pride in his veins?

That answer the future was to bring to him. He had no further chance just then to feel tenderly toward him, and the next hour brought forth an incident which annoyed and surprised him.

The Governor sat down to a light repast with the family and the guests, and then departed amid quiet farewells. One by one the others went also, and the bereaved relatives of the dead man were left to their own devices. Gertrude’s eyes were swollen and her nose red. Hugh gazed at her curiously. She appeared to him such a child—just like his little sister, as he called France. She

must have liked the dead man better than any of the others—and yet she was too young for him to have been her lover. His heart warmed to her. He looked at Mildred—classically beautiful, classically cold—and wondered why her lips were such a vivid scarlet and her large eyes such a warm purple, since the soul behind lips and eyes seemed so unfeeling. Then his glance wandered to his Aunt Estelle. Her fair hair was piled up on her head and curled over her temples in girlish fashion. But still she looked tired, worn out, bored, and again he wondered why. His mother never looked so with all her worries—her face was all peace and not discontent. She was not a woman like his mother, with a tender thought toward Westport and the little home.

He did not try to make conversation. He felt that if there were real sorrow in any heart there, words would be unendurable just then. The windows were thrown open to catch what breeze there was, and gazing out at the green fields and the towering trees he felt a quiet reverence steal over him. His father had been born here, his high-spirited, noble father. Here he had played in childhood, studied in boyhood, and to this home he had said farewell in his young manhood. He had never forgotten it, however, and love for it was one of the traditions instilled into all his children with the very air they breathed. There was that about the place which appealed to some silent chord. It was palatial in its stretch of land, its big rooms, its massive furniture, its rich appearance. It was so old, this royal mansion—and it had been the cradle of his race for generations.

"If it will cheer you any to do so," said Uncle Eric to the silent Gertrude at last, "you may go outside with Hugh and show him part of the grounds. Take him down the chestnut walk—our sun may prove too warm for him after his northern climate."

Gertrude was used to obedience, so she got up at once. But Hugh Lindsay, roused out of his reverie, did not stir.

"This is our lily of the field," continued Uncle Eric, in what he meant to be a jocular tone. "Who toils not, neither does she spin—"

"Yet even Solomon in all his glory," added Hugh, smiling at

her. He took his watch out of his pocket. "I would hardly have time to see much," he said, "so I think I will spend my last few minutes here. A glimpse of Lindsay would but tantalize me—therefore I shall defer sightseeing until some future day."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked his uncle, in evident astonishment.

"I ordered the wagonette to come back for me at four," said Hugh pleasantly. "I am on my vacation now—I took it early this year, because the senior partner goes to Europe next month and I'll be needed. Then again, my mother has not had me home in six months, and I wish to spend as much time as possible with her. I return this evening."

"I think you owe me the common courtesy of spending one night at least under my roof," said Uncle Eric, his eyes flashing angrily. "I have sent the servant to the office with a telegram for your mother, informing her you would not be home for the next three or four days. She is probably a wise woman," he went on, in the sarcastic manner that Hugh had already learned to dislike, "as wise as the rest of her sex. She'll not object to the arrangement."

Slowly, almost painfully, Hugh turned his head until his eyes met his uncle's full.

"You telegraphed to my mother?" His gorge was rising.

"I did," was the calm answer. "And if you have any regard for your own interests, young man," he added, significantly, "you'll stay as long as I want you."

Hugh leaned almost carelessly back in his chair. Afterward he remembered that he had wondered what sort of people his uncle had come in contact with to dare speak to him in this manner. Afterward he remembered that Gertrude had flashed him a deprecating smile, as if in atonement for his uncle's harsh words, that Mildred did not turn her eyes from the window, that his aunt's expression never wavered. His fingers, hanging loosely over the arm of the chair, gripped it sharply. White lines showed about his nose. He measured the older man with his glance, and held his gaze, while he spoke in a slow, wrathful tone, never rising

above its ordinary conversational note—yet which electrified every one in that room.

"I came here to-day," he said, "at your request—because you are my uncle—because Harry Lindsay was my first cousin. I came because I—and my mother—thought that you might imagine me guilty of disrespect to the dead or of insult to you if I did not come. I came because I—and my mother—wanted you to feel that as Catholics and Christians we had forgotten the past. What your motive was in sending for me I do not know—neither do I care. I am a Lindsay, but an independent Lindsay, thank God. My two hands are honest hands, Uncle Eric—my shoulders are broad ones. Broad enough to bear their own burdens, to make their own way in the world. To tell you that I do not look upon this place with reverence would be a lie—for I am a Lindsay. But to tell you that I stand under your roof free from all covetous or envious thoughts is no lie. I have no wish to step into your shoes. I have no wish to cringe to you and to fawn on you, because you are twenty times a millionaire and the owner of the house in which my fathers have been born. Money is of little account. I pity you from the bottom of my heart, Uncle Eric. You have all that money means—but I would not change places with you to-day for all your wealth."

There was absolute silence in the room. Aunt Estelle's face had lost its apathetic expression. She was staring at her nephew, her under lip falling. Mildred turned her cold gaze upon him. Gertrude, quivering from head to foot, her sweet face glowing, looked from one to the other eagerly. And then—

Uncle Eric held his arms wide, tears came into his eyes, his big frame shook.

"Hugh!" he cried. "Hugh! My boy, my boy, forgive me."

There was no withholding the appeal in that voice. The young man met it half-way. He did not pause or hesitate, he did not stop to think. But he looked upon his uncle, and knew that this cold, proud man had a heart, and that he had touched it. He sprang up from his chair, and went to those extended hands, putting his own within them and around them. Clasping each other

so, they stood, breathless, gazing for one long, long minute into each other's souls.

"I plead now where I commanded. Stay with me, Hugh—only for a little while. I would know what it is like to have a son after my own heart."

"Thank you, Uncle Eric," said Hugh, simply. "Thank you. I will stay."

* * * * *

Gertrude acted as cicerone the next morning. She had recovered her spirits partially overnight, and appeared at the breakfast table in a dainty white muslin gown (Aunt Estelle was the only one who wore black for the dead man).

"Uncle Eric has given me the greatest list of instructions," she said to Hugh, confidentially. "Instructions that I don't mean to follow out, either—I don't believe in showing people too much at once. It would have been better if Mildred had come with us —then you would have missed nothing, surely. But she absolutely refused. So you must do your best to get along with just me."

He laughed, assuring her that he had no desire to find a better guide, and inwardly positive he could have none more animated. She was alive to the very finger-tips, this little thing barely to his shoulder.

Carefully as he locked his artistic longings in his secret heart, they bubbled up within him as Gertrude led him through the long hall and he stood under the arching portico and looked about him.

The stretch of ground to the big gray outer gate was covered with small shrubbery; at the gate itself the live oak avenue started —great green and silver trees, their gnarled branches meeting in the middle and forming a canopy over the road, which, as Hugh looked down it, seemed to grow narrower and still more narrow, and darker and still more dark, until even in the full glory of the morning sun the distance was lost in gloom.

"There are forests out there," said Gertrude, with a wave of her hand. "Forests all blossom and color and life and glory. Come with me, Cousin Hugh, until you smell our wonderful magnolia and our golden jasmine."

He moved beside her down the steps, watching the earnest face as it kindled into enthusiasm. From the outer gate they turned off into the forest—a forest of pines—pines that seemed to lose their lofty heads in the wonderful sky. Here a clearly defined path seemed to entice them farther into the cool bosom of the earth.

"This was once all swamp land," said Gertrude. "But Uncle Eric had it drained—see, here is Lindsay River—that isn't its name, really—it is but an offshoot of the great stream that runs down past Kentboro. But this little branch of it has been called the Lindsay, always. And here is the bridge. Aren't you in fairy-land now, cousin?"

He did not speak, but his face was eloquent. Where the sun touched the water it laughed back at the rays of light; the little boat moored at the foot of the bridge rocked idly, with a sing-song, sleepy movement. There was not one touch to mar the beauty of the scene. No sounds about them but harmony the sweetest. And the air, even so early in the morning, was heavy with the scent of the gorgeous blossoms of the South. After a while, when the first realization of the unaccustomed beauty of the place wore off, Hugh was struck by the thought that, looked at with cold Northern eyes, color and foliage were almost too exuberant.

"Lindsay must be very large," he said.

"Some thirty thousand acres," she answered. "The quarters—that is, the negroes' houses, you know, are away off—we can ride there this afternoon in the cool of the day—or to-morrow morning. Uncle Eric always has negroes for the field work, but they're a lazy lot at best. You want to get old Matthew talking about them. Old Matthew was at Lindsay before the Civil War—and has some queer tales to tell."

"Old Matthew? Is old Matthew alive yet?"

"Why, of course—how do *you* know old Matthew?"

"You forget my father was born here."

"That is so—I had forgotten. Cousin, do you know I like you?"

"You do? I am glad to hear that. And why?"

"I can't explain—yet. It seems to me you have a firmer grip on life than other men I have met—you would not want it to have many secrets from you."

He looked at her in amazement.

"Where have you learned to express yourself so?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Let us turn back. I can only show the beauty of the place. With old Matthew to tell you all about the market-value of each spot, you will doubtless see things with other eyes than you do to-day. But the ride down the oak avenue to the pine lands you must take with me and with none other." Then looking at her watch: "That will be in about an hour's time, if you care to go to Mass with me this delightful Sunday morning."

He laughed at her earnest face.

"I certainly do, if you will allow me to accompany you. If not I must find my way alone. But I believe I came up by way of the avenue when I reached here yesterday."

"Only part of it. You cut across into it from the forks—no, indeed, you haven't seen it all. I heard Wills talk about your coming—at your very first appearance, even, you mortally offended the traditions of the house."

"And how?" he asked.

"By showing yourself—and you one of us—at our doors in a hired conveyance, with three carriages in the Lindsay stables and twelve of the finest horses—"

"You forget—they *were* in the Lindsay stables," he answered, lightly, responding to her mood. "And as such were of little use to me."

"Which, of course, was your own fault." She called his attention to the chestnut walk, but did not offer to go there, and then they stepped up on the big stone piazza—fully thirty feet wide—comfortably sheltered from the sun. In the great hallway there were two broad fireplaces, with an exquisitely carved gallery running around its four sides from the first landing. Wonderful pictures hung upon the walls—pictures worth a ransom. The rooms, of majestic proportions, were wainscoted in oak, the furni-

ture of massive mahogany seemed fit for the great apartments that made its setting. With the influx of wealth to the Lindsay coffers strenuous efforts had been made to restore the old home to what it had been before years of poverty made it shabby. The furniture, built for the use of ages, had needed but little attention, though the renovation of the Lindsay tapestries cost a small fortune.

"Let us go to the picture gallery," she said. "It is Uncle Eric's hobby. He will forgive me much if I show you that in all its glory. And really, it is wonderful."

Hugh had to confess it was. The ceiling was of rare wood, and the walls were covered with paintings that, to the young man's dazzled sight, were riches indeed. On the north side were hung the family portraits. Hugh, with quick-pulsing heart, stood looking, for the first time, at the men of his loyal line.

"This is Gerard Lindsay," he cried, pointing to the portrait of one tall, noble-looking man, dressed in courtly fashion. "Many times have we children wept over his tragic ending. And there is Earl Stanislas, who fought at Crècy and died there, and was found standing dead with the English banner in his hand. And Sir Peter—"

"Am I showing you this gallery, or are you showing it to me?" asked Gertrude, with mock anger, and Hugh subsided, somewhat surprised at his own emotion. He walked more sedately down the line then, until he came to the immediate family. He was delighted when he recognized his father in the rosy-cheeked little lad leaning against his own father's knee. He stood looking at it, a great tenderness filling his heart.

"That is Agatha," he said, pointing to the pretty woman who sat beside her husband. "My sister, you know. Father named her for his mother—and she is exactly like that picture—excepting that she is a few years younger, and the clothes, of course, are different."

"Agatha!" said Gertrude. "I love that name—it makes me think of peaceful, happy things. Is your sister happy?"

"We are all happy at Westport," answered Hugh, smiling.

“This is Mrs. Lindsay? The years have dealt lightly with her, haven’t they?”

He admired the good-looking young woman in her stiff silk gown—then his eyes strayed to a picture standing right below hers.

“And this?” he asked, stepping back to see it better. Then an involuntary exclamation of astonishment burst from him. “What a face—what a splendid face!”

“I am glad Uncle Eric is not with us,” said Gertrude. “This is Laurence’s picture. It is in banishment—we keep it in the alcove there. Yet every time you come into the gallery you can find this picture standing in this position, as if waiting to be hung.”

“Let me look at it,” he said, quickly.

“But if Uncle Eric comes—”

“I will take the blame,” he answered, putting out his hand to stop her as she made a movement as if to take it away. A master hand had painted the wonderful face that looked out at him now from the great gold frame. It was that of a young man—not more than twenty-one—and of striking beauty. The hair was black as a raven’s wing, waved carelessly from a broad, white forehead. The eyes were dark also, soft as velvet, with a glint as of fire in their liquid depths. The mouth was well curved and wonderfully sweet. Those dark eyes seemed to hypnotize Hugh as he stood there, so that he felt he could not judge this face impartially, because of its great beauty. He knew there was something lacking in that countenance—but what it was he could not tell, nor, standing thus before it, could he analyze. There was a brooding expression—a passionate fire that the artist had caught and transferred to the canvas. Gertrude waited patiently while he looked at it. But at last he became so absorbed that she put her hand upon his arm, and gave him a little shake.

“Do not let it fascinate you,” she said, breaking in upon his reverie. “It is a wonderful face, I know, but—”

She went to it, took it up carefully, and carried it to the alcove at the end of the hall. Here she turned it face inward, and coming out, drew the curtains, so that it was altogether hidden.

"A useless thing to do," she said. "Uncle Eric spends hours in this gallery some days—and every single time he comes that picture is where we have just seen it. He raves and scolds and storms and threatens, but he can't find the guilty one."

"But who is it—who is it?"

"Who? Why, that is Laurence—uncle's heir before he took Harry. Somebody in the house still loves him well enough to risk doing this thing. We imagine it must be one of the old servants. *I* might be accused of it," she said, lifting her brows archly, "and, in fact, was—until I proved an alibi two or three times. They put me down for all the wicked things that happen—but not for this one."

"They do? I should not call tenderness of heart wicked." Gertrude shrugged her shoulders.

"Why does Uncle Eric keep the portrait, since he hates him so?" went on Hugh.

"The famous artist L—— painted it—it is one of our treasures. Afterward, when we are dead and gone, it will have honored place on these walls."

"I suppose so. I do not know much about Laurence—but from what I have heard I think I am rather disappointed now. His face is handsome, very. Was he really so handsome?"

"I can scarcely remember. The picture was painted eight years ago. Laurence must be about thirty by this time—and he left Lindsay when I was only a child—he has been gone fully five years. We are not permitted to talk of him."

"He is better forgotten."

"You are unmerciful, Cousin Hugh."

"I can not forgive ingratitude."

"Indeed? We know what we are—we know not what we may be."

Again a thrill of surprise went through him. He gave her a quick glance.

"I have a weakness for Laurence. He had an artist's eye, and he was an artist, too, in his way. In fact, it was from some of his old scribblings that I first learned to appreciate the beauties of

Lindsay Manor. He loved every inch of this place, and wherever he is to-day he still loves it with all his soul."

"Has his face nothing to do with your liking?" he asked, teasingly. "Surely such a face as that is enough to win any maiden's heart."

"I have none," she returned shortly, and so coldly that he felt he had offended this changeable maiden of eighteen, half-child, half-woman. "What do you think I should do with a heart here in Lindsay Manor?"

"Surely, surely, if ever a heart was needed it is here in Lindsay Manor," said Hugh, in as grave a tone as her own.

"Oh, of course, bestow it, give it, lavish it, waste it—and pick up the pieces then. A broken heart is small comfort. I have no desire to beat out my life against the iciness of my companions. Ugh! Let us change the subject. I am cold—the very thought chills me."

They were silent after that. Hugh was sorry, but he knew not what to say. Still silent they came down to the first floor again, and she led him into a wonderful conservatory, where the soft light coming through the leaded panes seemed to be tinted green, and the great fountain playing in the center made the place as cool as it was delightful. And here Gertrude seemed to recover some of her sparkle, and to breathe more freely.

"I like you," she said, naïvely, looking up into his face with her young eyes. "You'll get tired hearing me say that, I suppose. But you are the only man I ever met who wasn't afraid to be honest. So if I speak freely to you, you mustn't mind it. It's because you are so different. I hate cowards!"

Her eyes flashed as she spoke. Then just as suddenly the dimples showed themselves in her cheeks.

"Look about you, sir," she said. "Look about you—or Aunt Estelle will say I have not done the Manor justice. This is her one extravagance—and I know, at the bottom of her thrifty heart, she moans over every penny it costs her. This is her pride, the joy of her heart, her childling. And if you want to stand any way high in her favor, you must praise it. And after that you must

still praise it. And again you must praise it. It is well to have Aunt Estelle on your side," she added, a trifle maliciously. "She is not overgenerous to those who do not please her."

She wanted to see the Lindsay backbone stiffen, perhaps, for she was a tormenting little thing at times. Hugh turned his gaze on her. It seemed to pierce her with its coldness, go through her, and beyond her. But he did not speak—and she, as if utterly unconscious of that gaze, still kept at his side, speaking easily and freely, pointing out the beauties of the place to him. In a few moments he forgot she had annoyed him, in wonder at the quaintness of her remarks, the quick repartee ever ready on the tip of her little tongue.

"There are things here at Lindsay people go miles out of their road to see. And every once in a while some crazy collector wanders along and tries to buy this or that or the other thing. Sometimes it is a chipped plate, or an old china cup, or a bit of decoration—or any old notion he gets into his head. It is too funny."

Hugh smiled.

"Uncle scarcely enjoys that, I guess," he said. "I should not imagine I would care to have so many things that other people envied me the possession of."

"From what part of the world do you hail?" she queried, with a smile. "You Northerners are of the commercial class—we take life easier. And yet you can calmly stand there and say a thing like that to me? The possession of beautiful things is only enjoyable while others envy you. What good would be this great estate, this wonderful Manor, if there were no poor outsiders to look longingly over the fence and wish for some of the beauties they can never have? Oh, no. There is only the one reason why wealthy people surround themselves with unnecessary luxuries, Cousin Hugh."

"Don't talk like that," said Hugh, slowly. "You are too young, too childish, to be so cynical. Where have you learned it all?"

He spoke so gravely and so thoughtfully that seriousness crept

into her mobile face, and stayed there, and she looked at him with new eyes.

"I am a child," she said, crossing her arms in a way he was to learn was her habitual manner when talking on any subject that interested her greatly. "It is my only relief—my childishness. In this great house I should go crazy if I did not break loose on occasion and shock them with my vivacity. Mildred is so staid, so proud. Aunt Estelle is always tired. Uncle Eric is— Well, I like Uncle Eric the best of all, but he won't let me like him." She spoke despondently.

"I think he cares for you very much," said Hugh. "I am a stranger here, so perhaps I notice things more quickly than another would. I thought yesterday, when Uncle Eric looked at you—"

"He is always reproving me," she burst out, passionately. "Always, either he, or Aunt Estelle. And Mildred— Well, Mildred is small comfort as a companion. You can walk with her ten miles and she wouldn't open her lips to you unless you spoke first."

"Why not go away for a while?" he asked gently.

"Where?" she queried, in a moody voice. "I have no one to go to—no one. I am all alone in the world. Uncle Eric is my guardian."

"Make the best of things then," said the young man. He was not surprised at the personal tone into which they had fallen. Somehow it would have seemed odd had Gertrude Waring stood on ceremony. "We all have to give up things more or less in this world," he went on. "I, too, have had my dreams. I wanted to be a famous artist and fate has made me a clerk."

"A clerk!" She looked at him quickly. "Uncle Eric told us you were a lawyer."

"I am not," he answered. "I am confidential man to a firm of real estate brokers. It is only clerking on a higher scale. That kind of work is not choice—it is necessity with me. There is a dear mother, my two sisters, and my boy brother, all as happy in their own little home as any people I have ever met—happier

than most. While I can do it they shall be provided for. I have neither time nor inclination for studying law. All my precious leisure moments are given to the art I love."

"I wondered how you knew things so quickly upstairs—all the finer points, I mean," she said. "That notion will not please Uncle Eric. Laurence—whom I do not think had much talent for it, however—wanted to be an artist, and Uncle Eric wouldn't let him."

"Why?"

"I don't really know. The trouble is, you see, Uncle Eric is just about fifty years behind the times. He doesn't want the future heir of this place to be anything but its master—that, and nothing more. He won't realize that the old-time traditions are fairy-tales to the rising generation of to-day."

Hugh gasped.

"You are certainly very frank," he said.

"'Tis my privilege."

"I suppose, occasionally, you tell Uncle Eric that?"

"Indeed I do. I was the only one ever straight up and down told Uncle Eric what I thought of him until you came. You and I ought to form a pact between us—the truth-teller league."

"And a disagreeable pair we'd make of ourselves," said Hugh. "I, if I were in *your* place—because, really, I shall be here so short a while that it doesn't matter—would try altogether different tactics. Be kind and sweet and gentle toward him—I know you are that by disposition—"

"Affection can not be commanded."

"It is the only thing you will never receive if you don't return it," said Hugh, bluntly.

She looked at him curiously, opened her lips for the retort ever ready upon them—but no word came. Then she dabbled her little fingers in the water that filled the basin of the fountain.

"I am not—unhappy," she said in a low voice. "That is, not *too* unhappy. But I feel sometimes like a bird caged in between iron bars, against which I beat in helpless longing for freedom. I wish, oh, I wish I could go away, far away, to some

little, little, teeny-weeny place. I am tired of the bigness of everything. It seems to swallow me up."

She shook the water from her fingers and turned toward the door that led out to the terrace at the back of the house. Her child-eyes sought the distant forest. When she raised them to his face again they were brimming with tears.

"Better a hut with affection than a palace without it," she said. "I want you to forget that I have betrayed myself this morning. I am a foolish girl—but perhaps my heart is a little bit softer than usual—I am so sorry for poor Harold. He—he wasn't good, I know," she went on, "not according to what I think a man should be. He told me part of his worries, though I am so young, and he had reason for his recklessness—a reason no one here knows but I myself—not even Uncle Eric. Even when he felt the worst he always had a pleasant word for me—the others wouldn't jest in a hundred years. Well, well," she sighed again, "perhaps I'll get old, too, and cranky, and used to it."

He smiled at the lugubrious tone.

*"Sweet Lady April, smile, as do the flowers,
With glowing faces after cooling showers,"*

he hummed, softly. And she smiled, too, and her eyes sparkled.

"You mean me?" she said, "and you sing? I am so glad. Perhaps you dance? Oh, do you? I love dancing. We'll get Mildred to play for us—we'll have a wonderful time. Not yet, of course. But maybe—soon. You won't leave us right away? Look, there is Wills at the door with the carriage. Just wait until I put on another hat—I won't be a minute, and I couldn't go to church in this one. It's about half an hour's drive—oh, it will be just splendid not to have to go to church alone. Wait until you see the funny little place! And Father Dering—he is lost out here, he is *such* a preacher!"

She darted away from him, and he, walking the length of the terrace to the front entrance, found himself smiling at the appro-

priateness of his appellation—for surely this was a very April's lady of smiles and tears. Then, raising his eyes, he saw that Mildred was watching him from the window of the long drawing-room. He bowed, and she returned his salutation with a cold nod. It would have been absurd, perhaps, to think such a thing even to himself—but he felt that there had been aversion, dislike akin to hatred in her eyes when he first encountered their glance.

CHAPTER V.

A HEART'S BETRAYAL.

MONDAY found Uncle Eric in one of his worst tempers. His lawyer had arrived that morning, and there was nothing to be thought of but the final settlement of the dead Harold Lindsay's affairs. They were grievously muddled—and, in addition, from papers found among his effects, they discovered that he had been married—and that his wife was a country girl living in Kentboro.

This was the crowning blow. The old man had been deceived and outraged, but this last discovery settled the hot wrath that time might have assuaged, out of very respect for the dead, into a cold, white temper certain to endure. He sat at luncheon gloomy and abstracted. Where was he to put faith in any of mankind? Laurence, whom he had loved from his very babyhood, had angered him mortally. Harold had been little liked, but with his more reserved, respectful manner, he at least had thought him worthy. Yet he had done acts befitting no Lindsay. He had said to Hugh only two days ago that no Lindsay could ever be a scoundrel. Now he was fain to confess that had his dead nephew borne any other name, scoundrel would have been the only term sufficiently expressive, judging him by the deeds he had done—spending money that was not his own—defrauding his uncle of all that he could lay his hands on—evading debts of honor—borrowing money right and left on his chances as Uncle Eric's future heir—marrying in secret a low-born girl—

Oh, it was more than the old man could stand. In his rage he wished the dead nephew could come to life just long enough to give him the satisfaction of telling him what he thought of him. But as such a miracle was not being performed—even to satisfy

the wishes of a Lindsay—he sat at the lunch table in the grumpiest of moods. He looked at Hugh, wondering grimly how much sincerity there had been in the declaration that had moved him so much. Wondering if, after all, it was not a ruse to win the rich old uncle's favor. The dreadful canker of suspicion, always with him, had been eating at his heart this last five years, embittering his whole existence. Why should he believe this man any more than the others? What did he know of him, or concerning him?

"Gertrude was good enough to take me through the picture gallery yesterday," said Hugh in his pleasant voice, and without pretending to see the darkness of the old man's face—if in fact he noticed it at all. "This morning I found my way alone—I spent four or five hours there. You have some beauties, Uncle Eric—but I think that Meissonier is a forgery."

Uncle Eric looked at him, too astonished to speak for a second.

"What!" he exploded then. "My Meissonier a forgery! Why, I paid ten thousand dollars for that in Paris eight years ago!"

"Can't help it, uncle," laughed Hugh. "It would be worth three times that if it were the real thing—but I'm pretty positive it isn't. I've studied pictures a good bit all my life, and it seems to me the hallmarks on this are lacking. Come up with me after lunch and I'll explain what I know about it."

"If it isn't genuine, I'll cut that villain Docles' throat! He managed the sale, and if I get my fingers on him—oh, hang it, what a fool I am! You don't know anything about pictures!"

He wrinkled his brows and looked at his nephew with scornful eyes. His sudden anger, his quick change of tone, made the young man laugh heartily.

"*You* knew enough about that one to pay ten thousand dollars for it?" he asked.

Banks the lawyer turned to Uncle Eric.

"You will remember I advised you not to trust Docles in that matter?" he said courteously. "I shouldn't be a bit surprised if your nephew's suspicions were confirmed."

There was good, healthy rage purpling Uncle Eric's face now. He hit the table with the flat of his hand.

"You come up with me to that gallery just this minute!" he roared, "and if I find out—"

"No time," interposed Banks. "I have to get back to Charlest^{on} to-night, sir—we can attend to that later."

"Oh, of course, yes—I forgot. To-morrow morning, then, Hugh? There is a lot of tiresome business I must finish this afternoon."

Later, closeted with Mr. Banks, after poor Harold's effects had been finally settled, everything made clear, and nothing remained but to pay what debts were left, the lawyer looked at his client searchingly.

"You have not yet destroyed the will you made in favor of your oldest nephew?" he asked. "Remember, if anything happened to you, there might be serious legal complications."

"We won't talk of that just now," returned Eric Lindsay, somewhat sadly. "Old friend, I am tired of heirs and of expectations, of luxury and wealth and position—of everything. I wish to God I were a man of the people—a man with but enough to keep the roof over my head."

"You have been unfortunate," said the lawyer. "Very unfortunate. You will bear in mind that I warned you the first time, very often—"

"Oh, I don't blame you at all, Banks."

"These last unhappy occurrences, concerning Harold, of course I heard nothing of—they kept them *sub rosa* in a very clever manner. Aarons & Mosheim, once they get their clutches on a man whose prospects look as bright as Harold Lind—"

"Don't go into details—things are bad enough without bringing them up again. You see that they are paid what you consider a decent sum."

"Before I go I should like to say another word—it is in favor of that young fellow I met to-day."

"You mean?"

"I mean that, with your very best interests at heart, I have

kept track of the Northern Lindsays. It is well to know a few things concerning all possible claimants—especially on an estate involving such tremendous interests as this. From what I have heard, he is not the kind to disappoint you. You see," settling back in his chair, "he hasn't been raised in expectations—he has not been taught to look upon your wealth as his own. I think, to speak to you candidly, that you have at last found an honest man."

"My heart tells me so, Banks—because he is of my blood. But my common sense warns me to be careful. So I shall make no changes in my will—yet. I must see further. I trusted Laurence—"

"Can you stand perhaps a rather startling bit of news?" cut in the lawyer, quickly. "About seven months ago I received a letter from Costa Rica."

"Well?"

"It was from a person who called himself Allan Fraser. Immediately that I received it I sent a man out to verify the facts therein contained. I took that liberty upon myself, because I did not wish to disturb you, and because I knew you would authorize my act. The story in the letter was true. I have in my possession the papers, documents, diary, seal ring, and gold watch of," he hesitated, with a keen glance into the old man's interested face, "of the late Laurence Lindsay," he finished.

"The—*late*—Laurence—Lindsay!" said Uncle Eric. "The *late*—Laurence—Lindsay! Oh, my God!"

His head fell forward on his breast; the lawyer averted his eyes.

"Allan Fraser wrote me that they had wandered there together from the pearl fields. He had been Laurence's chum and comrade for two years, and when he was taken with the fever he nursed him to the end, buried him, and sent his effects to me, as the dying man had requested."

"And no word, Banks—no other word?"

"Nothing but what I tell you. Here in this package you will find the things as they were returned."

"Dead!" said Uncle Eric. "Dead!"

His heart was stirred. At that moment he forgot everything but that he had loved the man of whom they were speaking.

"Poor Laurence, poor boy! Perhaps if I had been kinder—oh, what an old fool! Kindness would have been wasted on them—either one of them. There was a black strain in the blood somewhere—they were both alike." He straightened up. "It's just as well that he died—it simplifies matters."

"Might I suggest again that it would be well for you to consider the remaking of your will," began the lawyer, in a hesitating voice. He knew how Eric Lindsay hated the word.

"Will! Don't mention will again—it's made out in the favor of my eldest nephew, isn't it? Hugh's that, isn't he, in case anything happens? And as for me, I'll outlive your successor, Banks. Come down three months from now—I'll have my mind made up then."

"Take my advice, Mr. Lindsay—"

Uncle Eric got up from the library table, swearing.

"I won't—that's all there is to it. I must have time—time to consider—to weigh things—to think them over. There now, Banks, excuse me, but why in the world do you pester so? I must and shall have my way in this matter. Come. Everything is settled, and I want you to drive with me over to the pine lands. Old Matthew will explain to you just how things are shaping themselves."

Uncle Eric was a poor companion that evening at dinner. Hugh had no thread to the cause of his preoccupation, nor was he one to seek it, and he suggested early adjournment to the drawing-room without protest from the older man.

"It is too bad we can not have some music," said Mildred, with a glance at the closed piano. There was no reply, and for the next ten minutes the only sound in the room was the ticking of the onyx and gilt clock upon the mantel. Uncle Eric had not heard her speak—or would not condescend to answer her. Gertrude, who loved idleness for its own sake at times, sat with her small hands folded in her lap, looking like a child who had been

naughty, and was bidden to sit still for penance. Hugh was too self-satisfied just then to crave physical exertion, for the dinner had been excellent and he was only mortal man. His gaze wandered to his aunt, and with his mental habit of character study very much on the alert, for all his indolent appearance, he wondered why her thin, long face seemed so ennuied, why there were such weary lines under her eyes, why the corners of her mouth drooped so.

"In the name of activity, what is the matter with her?" he thought to himself. "I don't hear them saying she's out of sorts in any way." He stretched his long legs a little, to settle himself more comfortably. "It isn't natural," he spoke the last words in a positive half-whisper, "it isn't natural."

Gertrude caught the muttered words, and followed his glance. Her lips twitched roguishly.

"Of course it isn't natural, you foolish fellow," she said. "But just now it is thought to be fashionable."

The gaze Hugh turned upon her was not approving just then. She was altogether too observant, he thought, for one so young, and at that moment he did not like it. If Mildred Powell heard the observation and its answer she gave no sign, for she had learned to control her features—to school her lips and eyes. She was not one to wear her heart upon her sleeve, and her impassive manner chilled the more impulsive, affectionate Gertrude. Had she met the really lovable, earnest-hearted little creature half way, they could have been bulwarks of strength one to the other in the positions in which they were placed. Both were comparatively poor—with just enough to sustain them simply, modestly, if they depended on their own resources, and had not Lindsay Manor and Uncle Eric. He was very faithful in his trust where they were concerned—he paid as much attention to the investment of their small fortunes as he did to any of his most gigantic enterprises. Both girls were proud and independent. Both were practically alone—motherless, fatherless. But here the likeness ended. No living being knew what passed within Mildred Powell's soul. She wrapped her thoughts away from prying eyes, hid them alike from

sympathy and scorn. Gertrude, filled with the milk of human kindness, giving love spontaneously, weeping bitterly when she saw it was not appreciated, sunny, joyous as a summer's day, thoughtful, gloomy, a child, a woman by turns—was, in fact, a problem to the older girl, who knew no change. Perhaps it was because the elder saw her life and its purpose spread out before her—and the younger knew not what life meant—yet.

Aunt Estelle took up a bit of embroidery now, a trifling thing, for her eyesight was poor, though she would never confess it, and glasses she considered an abomination. She wanted to ask Hugh questions, the more personal the better, but she dared not do so in her husband's presence. She wanted to hear more of himself and of his family affairs. And she knew he would not talk of these unless some one questioned him. Uncle Eric, with a book between his fingers, sat unusually silent, even for him, in his favorite chair under the reading-lamp. Then Gertrude, seeming to feel she had some claim on her cousin by courtesy—perhaps because of the oneness of their religious belief—drew near to him, and started the conversation Aunt Estelle was longing for.

"Since we can not play or sing or do anything but mope so soon after a funeral, let us talk," she said, smiling. "Or do you talk to us, cousin, about your home and your people. And about New York. Do you know I am just *dying* to see New York? It must be a wonderful place."

"It is a noisy, busy place, where every one is in a hurry," answered Hugh, in his genial, mellow tones. Somehow, even in his gravest moments, his voice sounded deep and pleasant—a voice that one felt it good to listen to, it was so manly. "Where thousands upon thousands of people meet and jostle each other, and *rush*! Oh, how they *rush*! To work and from work. To pleasure and from pleasure. Hurry, hurry, hurry!"

"How odd!" said Mildred.

"How *terrible*!" was Gertrude's comment.

"You would grow used to it," said Hugh, confidently. "When I left Westport I thought I never could. But I like it now."

"Is Westport quiet?"

"Quiet? Well, comparatively speaking. Not as quiet as Lindsay, of course, because this place is as large as our town." Eric Lindsay, listening idly, became interested now. "I love every bit of it, though. I am fond of the country, anyhow, and my mother could not exist outside Westport."

"Is your mother nice?" asked Gertrude. "Forgive me—that is a silly question. But tell us all about her, won't you? I'd like to hear about a real live mother—I can not remember mine, except that she had great, big, beautiful brown eyes."

Eric Lindsay's head sunk a little lower, and the room faded from his sight. He was walking down a rustic path in Lindsay forest—a path overrun with tangled creepers and growing shrubbery, with the tiger-lilies in gaudy blossom among them, and the roses peeping out from the wild vines that ran along either side of the road. He was straight and strong and supple as one of the pines above him, with youth in his veins, and his hair was black as coal. To his arm she clung—a little, beautiful creature, with a face as rich white as the leaf of the magnolia in full blossom, and hair as glossy as its broad leaf—even so she looked as Gertrude Waring did to-day. He remembered how the sunlight filtered through the trees, and touched the deep bronze of her hair into golden light. He sighed and roused himself. Alas, for the old days, for the long-forgotten faces laid away, for the hearts that beat no more!

"My mother," Hugh was saying, and the words penetrated to Uncle Eric's dim ears—ears that had been listening to the music of a voice dead to all earth-sounds for seventeen years, dead to him for thirty. "How can I tell you about her, cousin? We do not see anything but beauty in the faces of those we love—I think my mother the loveliest woman I have ever seen. She is only a little woman—just as high as my heart, I say to her—and her lips, perhaps, are not so red as once they were, nor her eyes as bright. But to me those lips are the sweetest and those eyes the brightest in the world. I have never heard her speak an unkind word. All her life long her motto has been, 'Do not judge'—not even in trivial things—and she practises what she

preaches. That is all I can say about her—she is the best and sweetest and most loving woman on God's good earth."

The tenderness in his voice rang true. Gertrude looked at him with misty brown orbs. Aunt Estelle, sitting a straight, thin, precise figure in her chair, felt a vague pain stirring at her heart. What was there about this young fellow to awaken this longing—the overmastering wish that seized her—and which, had her lips been able, would have framed itself in the words, "Would that I had had a son like this, to speak of me in such terms as these, to love me as he loves his mother."

"My oldest sister is Agatha, named for my grandmother—Uncle Eric's mother. She is just like the picture upstairs—more like it than ever now that I had a better and longer look at it to-day. She is very dainty and aristocratic—and is engaged to be married—"

"To whom?" cut in Uncle Eric, in a gruff voice.

"To a young man named John Perry," answered Hugh, a little startled to find that his uncle was listening.

"Is he rich? Is he of good blood—good family?"

Hugh laughed.

"Good family? He's a business man—educated chiefly through his own efforts, clever, capable. I went to school with him, grew up with him, so I know that he is of good habits, and his people are all healthy. Better than that, he is of her own religion. Agatha is a lucky girl."

"Lucky? A Lindsay to— Oh, pshaw!"

Hugh was attacking the traditions of his race. Gertrude had been right in her assertion that he was almost his own age behind the times. He lived in the past—a distant, far away past, unconscious that the present was presenting its new and saucy, if very healthy, nose, right at his own doors. Hugh was bringing this present to him—bringing new ideas, new sentiments into the family circle.

"Then there is France. She is like you in appearance, cousin—a few years younger, and not—a little different," he had meant to say "not quite so pretty," but he thought better of it. "She

is one of those sensible maidens—mother relies on her even more than on Agatha, who is always quiet, and rather dreamy. The youngest is Phil—a boy at school. He has wonderful ideas for his twelve years. I am quite proud of him. A bit noisy and turbulent at times, but very ambitious."

"I think I should like Agatha the best," said Aunt Estelle, languidly.

"I daresay," was the young man's dry retort.

Uncle Eric waited for more to come. It did not.

"I, too, think I should like Agatha the best," he said after a moment. "Tell me what you mean by your 'I daresay.'"

"You really want me to?" asked Hugh. Some recklessness had possessed him ever since he entered the Manor. He thoroughly enjoyed "having his fling" as his mother would have called it—telling home truths to a man who had never heard them.

Uncle Eric raised his eyes and looked at him contemplatively. He never knew quite what was coming next from him, and strangest of all, he felt an overmastering desire to hear every word he had to say.

"I asked you to tell me," he said at last.

"Well, then, I will. Agatha, I think, has inherited a good deal of what you might classify as the Lindsay pride. It is a cold streak to have in the blood—that pride. If she were here—"

"If she were here? Go on, go on."

"She would be even as you are," declared Hugh, speaking almost rudely, his eyes hardening, "cool and contained, not seeking love nor giving it—self-possessed and chilling. She is better off in her own home atmosphere—with those she cares for. Love is the only thing can make a woman all God intended her to be. Wise love, true love, love well-directed."

"Humph!" said Uncle Eric.

"How awfully romantic!" murmured Aunt Estelle. This new nephew interested her more than words could say. It was the first evening in her life for years that she had not fallen asleep.

But to Gertrude, listening with parted lips, the speech was terribly real; her face shone with that glow that seemed to creep

into it when her heart was stirred. She was of an excitable disposition at best, and Hugh's words had set her whole soul on fire. She rose from her chair now, her little figure quivering, and in a trice was kneeling beside her guardian, her arms about his neck.

"Now, Uncle Eric, now, Uncle Eric!" she cried, half-sobbingly. "Don't you believe as Hugh does, don't you, don't you? Oh, Hugh!" with a glance of entreaty in his direction. "If I only knew your mother—if I only *knew* what it was to have a sister—and a brother—and a—a—home—like yours!"

And bursting into a passion of tears, she hid her face on her guardian's shoulder. Aunt Estelle sat up suddenly, a displeased expression on her fair, tired countenance, while Hugh was silent out of sheer distress, inclined to bite out his own tongue for the mischief it had done. He did not know what to say now—so he sat staring at his uncle and at Gertrude. And suddenly, to his surprise, Uncle Eric put his hand almost timorously on the girl's head—touching it as if it were something sacred. There was wonder on his face—in his eyes. The soft curls twined about his fingers, and he continued to stroke them gently, nor did he glance Hugh's way again.

Silence reigned. Hugh felt that he had caused it, and was anxious to talk now on any subject, but conversation would not come. He racked his brains vainly for some topic, some words. After that first outburst of grief—the grief of a loving, lonely little heart, Gertrude was very quiet, rather ashamed of her impulsiveness, but too much surprised at her guardian's new-found tenderness to care much either way. Mildred was Hugh's only refuge, and in his embarrassment he turned to her. She was not looking at him nor at any one. She had been working at a dainty handkerchief—Aunt Estelle could not bear to see the girls idle; in fact, her idleness was her chief complaint against Gertrude—and it lay spread out on her knee now. There was a tremulous quiver to her mouth Hugh did not observe. Feigning an air of unconcern he was far from feeling, he picked up the little bit of lace.

"How you women love these things!" he said, with a low, mellow laugh.

She seemed to hesitate—then she turned her eyes on him. They were shining, glowing, transfigured. Her cheeks had lost their marble pallor, and were tinted now with pink, her lips were parted. Hugh sat dumfounded. He had been giving surprises ever since he came to Lindsay. It was his turn now to be surprised. He had spoken to a statue—and the statue turned its face, and he saw it informed by the woman's soul. Only a glimpse—just one glimpse before the veil was on. But it thrilled him to the core. He felt as if he were standing before some Sphinx—some creature who had looked on a wondrous mystery, and hidden its secret in her breast, locking it away and closing up all apertures for fear one spark of its glory or its beauty might creep through.

"You were upstairs to-day?" she asked, and he wondered why he had not noticed before how sweet her voice was. "That was where you saw Agatha's picture?"

"Yes—in the gallery."

She averted her eyes, and he was glad, for it hurt him when she looked at him like that. He was afraid, too, that she might see the change in his face, the astonishment on it. When she brought them back again they had regained some of their wonted coldness, and he could speak to her more freely.

"Do you—like pictures?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Very much. Please God, some day I shall be an artist."

"Please God? How queer! Do you believe in God?"

"Miss Mildred!" The note in his voice only brought a strange smile to her cold lips.

"Peculiar, isn't it—I don't know whether I do or not. Let us speak of the pictures. We have some very fine ones up there."

"And some very bad ones, too," he retorted. "That Meissonier is a clear forgery—and there's a landscape of the impressionistic school I wouldn't give house room!"

Again she smiled.

"I have never—met—your—kind—before," she said, picking

out the pattern of the Renaissance in her lap, and speaking very slowly. "Who told just what he thought without fear or favor. And yet we meet quite a lot of people; now, of course, we are very quiet. But they were all too much afraid—or too proud. Even strangers are not honest with Uncle Eric."

"Yes?" He had no comment to make.

"There is a portrait upstairs—a portrait of—of a young man. It is in an alcove there. Did—Gertrude show you—that?"

"It was not in the alcove yesterday. And to-day when I went in, it was out against the wall again—even as it stood when I first saw it. You mean Lau—"

"Oh, hush!" She glanced at Uncle Eric almost fearfully. But his head was bent over Gertrude—he was murmuring something in her ear. "Do not speak that name aloud—do not. It is forbidden—tabooed. You saw the picture, then?"

"Yes. It is wonderful—magnificent."

"You really think so—really? I like it myself—very much—though I see it but seldom. It is banished. They say some one is always taking it out of its hiding-place, and Uncle Eric gets so angry, so very angry. It is awful to hear him sometimes. Did you ever see Laurence Lindsay?"

"No," said Hugh, adapting his tone to hers. "He must be about thirty now, isn't he? I never met him or came in contact with him. But from that picture—I stood one whole hour looking at it to-day and I am not ruled by sentiment or fancy. One can read the future of the man in his wonderful eyes. The artist who painted it made it a labor of love."

"It was, it was," said Mildred, in a strained voice.

"He possessed an almost magical power of fascination, I hear," went on Hugh. "It was a pity—so talented, so handsome, so nobly-gifted, and with so weak a will! What a combination!"

"He suffered most," said Mildred. "He was not to blame."

"Ah, Miss Powell—when many gifts are given much is expected in return. It is a dreadful thing to be unfaithful to one's own conscience. Laurence wasted, abused, de—"

"Don't!" said Mildred. "You—you never met him. You

mustn't judge him! I tell you, you mustn't judge him, not you, a stranger. He was not like others. He may yet achieve success."

"Perhaps," said Hugh. The impression forced itself upon him that he was giving her pain, though her face seemed cool and composed—she was not one to betray herself twice. "Of what value is this meteoric display? A quiet, honest, able life is worth more to the world than these brilliant comets who flash across our sky and disappear in a shower of sparks."

"Truly are you modest—comparing your life to Laurence's."

The mockery in her voice humbled him strangely. Perhaps in his sturdy pride he had been congratulating himself that he was not as they had been. It was well to have it brought before him in uncompromising fashion.

"Do you think such a life an easy one?" he made answer, in a less confident tone. "The devil is too busy and too envious to let a man rest who tries to be good. Self-discipline comes first. First learn to govern self—then is it time to govern others."

"Words, words, idle words," she said, still more coldly. "Laurence Lindsay was none of your quiet men, good and sensible—and stupid. Yet he would have made Lindsay Manor a power in the land. He would have given South Carolina a prestige to be envied even by you thrifty Northerners."

"Who deals in words now?" he asked, crossing swords with her. "Let us not quarrel—I did not know him well enough to judge. And yet, from his face—"

"Well?"

"From his face he is even as I describe him to you. He may become great—through a moment's folly."

Mildred shrugged her shoulders.

"We won't bandy words further," she said. "In so far as I knew Laurence, I think he did not deserve the cruel things that were spoken of him. Perhaps his future will redeem his past—perhaps he may yet prove he is not worthless after all."

Hugh felt himself rebuked.

"Who am I to pass judgment on a man I have never seen?" he asked contritely. "Forgive me if I have spoken harshly—"

She raised cold blue eyes to his face.

"I am interested in so trifling a manner that it is not at all necessary to ask my forgiveness," she said. "It may seem—"

"I'm going to bed," announced Aunt Estelle in a decided voice, rising from her chair. "I would advise you to take a good night's rest, Gertrude. After your hysterical outbreak you will need it. This has been a tiring day—I am fatigued beyond endurance," she added to the occupants of the room in general.

She bade them good-night then in a lofty fashion. Hugh imagined that she was very angry. He saw that she did not look at Uncle Eric when he rose to hold the portières aside for her, but went past him with her head in the air. She was indeed inwardly raging that her husband had seemingly encouraged Gertrude—had not said a word of reproof to her, but sat there with his hand on her head in that ridiculous fashion. It would be absurd to say that Aunt Estelle was jealous—but a woman does not live thirty years with a man without finding out almost all that she wishes to know about him. And while she had never succeeded in unearthing the buried past, her suspicions had always been more or less on the alert. Whatever she knew, or thought she knew, the fact remained that the harsher Uncle Eric was to Gertrude the more tender was Aunt Estelle—and the reverse.

"Every one is tired—so I think it would be best for all to go to bed," said the old man now. To Hugh his fine face seemed to have grown softer and more human this last half hour.

And in truth it had. He came over and held out his hand. "Long, long ago I dreamed fearless dreams like yours—dreams of bravery and honesty. I saw what I thought to be my duty—and I followed where it led. Saturday for the first time and again to-day, I realized that perhaps I—have made a mistake. I thank you for bringing the realization home to me. I am sorry for myself, but glad that I see my folly. Good-night, Hugh."

"Good-night, Uncle Eric." Their eyes met once more in that soul-searching glance as their hands clasped, and Hugh felt that all sordid doubts were swept away—that his uncle believed in him with a faith that would never waver again.

"Good-night, children," said the old man, still in that strangely tender tone, turning to the two girls. "And do you, child, Gertrude, pray for a crusty old man." He walked to the door, hesitated a moment—then turned again.

"It may be as well to tell you now," he said in a broken tone. "When you pray for Harold—as I know you do in your simple faith—pray for Laurence, also."

"Uncle—"

"Laurence is dead, child—died seven months ago of a fever, they say, and lies buried in an unhonored grave. If prayers avail anything, he will need them."

The portières dropped behind him then, but his straight form seemed to stoop a little as he spoke those last few sentences. Gertrude's shocked brown eyes met Hugh's.

"Laurence—dead!" she said. "Oh, he was too beautiful to die like that, too beautiful! I am so sorry! Mildred—oh, Hugh, look at Mildred! What is the matter? What can it be?"

The girl had not moved, nor uttered a sound, but as if something had struck her she lay back in her chair, both hands clasped across her breast, her face ashen, her eyes strained wide.

"Mildred!" cried Gertrude. "Poor Mildred, what is it, dear—what is it? Let me call Uncle Eric. You are ill—"

"No—no," said the pale lips. "No—it is nothing. Just a moment—it will surely pass in a moment. Surely this pain can't last—what was it he said? Oh, it isn't true—it can't be—What am I saying? Gertrude—yes, I can see you now. I thought you had gone away. It is my heart—"

She struggled with all the force of her nature to gain control of herself, and partially succeeded. Her hands dropped nerveless to her lap, and she tried to smile into Gertrude's worried face.

"I am much better now—how silly of me to frighten you so. I will go upstairs—you will come with me, Gertrude—to my room, for fear the pain returns? Good-night, Cousin Hugh."

She gave him her hand. It was like ice in his clasp. She rose, but swayed a little as she walked. And thus, declining Hugh's aid, and leaning slightly on Gertrude, she tottered to the door.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OTHER ACHING HEART.

UNCLE ERIC'S own body-servant came to wait on Hugh as soon as the young man entered his apartments—but he dismissed him, for he wanted to be alone, to think out the things he had heard and seen, to think over the happenings of that day.

Left to himself, he went to the window and threw aside the flimsy veil of lace that screened it. Then, turning from the silent beauty of the starry heavens, from the faint rustle in the tall, green pines, from the fragrance of the odorous night—from all things that would have pleased him had his brain been undisturbed by the new thoughts thronging through it, he folded his arms and surveyed the suite of rooms his uncle had placed at his disposal.

The door of his bedroom stood open, and the mellow electric light fell upon the lace-draped, luxurious bed. He looked at the walls, paneled in green of the softest forest shade. Quaint lily bulbs artfully concealed the electric lights. Furniture to delight the heart of a connoisseur was here, with a Persian rug upon the floor worth twenty times over the house in Westport, and every bit of furnishing it held. There was a small table containing a smoker-set in one corner, on which a box of cigars reposed, with the lid invitingly open. There were etchings upon the walls, and a marble Psyche on an onyx pedestal. It was a room to tempt the heart of an anchorite, no less than that of a man who was artistic to the finger-tips, who loved beauty for its own sake.

But he sighed, and unfolding his arms, went over to the table, helped himself to a cigar, and sank down into the big armchair.

What a house it was, he thought, watching the blue smoke

curling in little rings away over his head. What a big, gloomy, loveless house, and what inmates! His tired aunt, his imperious uncle. Long-forgotten stories of the two dead boys came floating through his brain. And they were dead—and he was here, here in the home of the Lindsays. His father's home, his grandfather's home, his people's home for generations. And now he saw before him the possibility of its being his own.

He faced this proposition as he faced all others that came into his life—calmly. His uncle had hinted as much—and supposing that hint came true? Did he care either way? It was a royal inheritance, indeed—a wonderful place. But it was barren. It lacked love, it lacked devotion, it lacked—God. He had never fully realized before the dreadful evil disregard for religion engenders in the human heart. No; he could not dream of his future—here. He could not imagine himself master. It was too improbable—and too unpleasant for this young man who ate bread of his own earning, leavened with the sweetness of taking care also of those he loved.

Mildred Powell's statuesque beauty floated before him. His eyes wandered to the cold features of the Psyche shining through the cloud of blue smoke that now enveloped it. No; she was not that any more. He had seen those eyes, that glowing face, those lips like a scarlet thread; he had seen the woman's tortured features—

“I don't understand,” he murmured aloud. “It isn't natural.”

He had said that once before. Nothing was natural in this cold house. He shuddered to think of Agatha or France in Gertrude's place. What a baby she was, he thought, with half-pitying tenderness. What a wilful, impulsive, gentle-hearted little soul!

He had heard in part the story concerning Laurence Lindsay, and in his own way it rose, bit by bit, before him now, that he might digest it slowly. After Hugh's father had so offended his brother Eric as to marry a Catholic and to become one, all the elder's affection seemed to center completely on the child Laurence. As he grew to manhood untold sums were spent upon his education—he was given all advantages. His mother saw little of him—

a quick pang of compunction shot through Hugh now: he had not been to see that mother yet!—she had nothing to do with his training or upbringing. And what did Eric Lindsay know of curbing an undisciplined, wayward nature? Money accomplished the boy's ruin—for money was his at command, and he sowed it lavishly. Uncle Eric gave and gave, liberally, at first, and against his lawyer's advice—as indeed Banks had told him that very day—then with dawning suspicion. The passion for gambling had Laurence in its clutches. He drank more than was good for him. He bet on the turn of an eyelash. He kept a racing stable. And when Uncle Eric called a halt, there were scenes that daily grew more bitter. And at last things came to such a pass that words were exchanged—words the old man would never forgive as long as he lived, he said, and the young man asked him to remember them always, to think of them when he thought of him. Then it was that Uncle Eric swore his awful oath that dead or living Laurence Lindsay should never rest a night under his roof. And whistling to Fortune, as if the merry jade stood ready at his command, the reckless fellow jeered at his uncle, and went forth a wanderer.

The end was—death. Unknown, uncomforted, unmourned, save by a stranger's passing thought, he had met his fate.

Hugh sighed and stirred and looked at the cigar, the end of which was black. He did not relight it again, but undressed and got into bed.

* * * * *

When he went to breakfast the next morning it was with the fully-formed intention of announcing his departure that afternoon. There had come, overnight, an almost feverish longing to get away. Yet every one was more than ordinarily good tempered. Gertrude smiled at him; his uncle looked up with a hearty greeting; Aunt Estelle, whose manner to Gertrude savored of studied coldness, unbent a trifle from her languor, and made him more completely a member of the family circle by telling him that Mildred was indisposed, but would be down for luncheon. Hugh made sympathetic comment, and dropped into his place as if he had

sat in it all his life. It was, in fact, this feeling of "at homeness" that made him want to get away—paradoxical as that assertion may seem.

"Old Matthew is waiting for you," said Uncle Eric when the meal was half over. "I have given him orders to take you around the whole property. There's a fine horse for you in the stable, and as soon as breakfast is finished you can start. Matthew is a character—you will be pleased with the stories he can tell you of old times, when your father and I were lads together."

"I wish we could go to Colonel Fenton's before Hugh leaves," said Aunt Estelle, graciously. "But it is too soon after our bereavement. Mrs. Fenton, who is in Europe now with her daughter, is of one of New York's blue-blooded families. The colonel's sister is keeping house in her absence."

"I do not care to meet any one," said Hugh. "I had rather go for a ride—it is long since I have had that pleasure."

He found old Matthew Horton waiting for him, and the horses saddled. Hugh swung himself up on the back of one with the easy grace of a country boy and started on his expedition.

It was an expedition, as he soon discovered, over forest and field. There were acres of land under cultivation, with scores of servants working them, black and white. As the older man explained things in his brief, quick way, Hugh had time to observe him closely. He was tall and straight and soldierly, and his eye was still so keen and so bright that one found it hard to believe he was in his eighty-fifth year. He had been with the Lindsays all his life. He had come to them in their poverty, had stayed when Eric Lindsay's marriage brought him wealth and power. He had sorrowed and laughed, mourned and rejoiced with them. He had been faithful with a fidelity that seems strange in these sordid, selfish days, when a man's love is measured by money.

"Show me Blind Man's Cove, Matthew," said Hugh at last. "Into which father fell one day, and you and Uncle Eric thought he was killed. And when you scrambled down, scared to death, to pick up what was left of him, he had disappeared—"

"And when we did find the young villain he had made away

with every blessed berry we'd picked on the way down! Lord, now, do you know that?" chuckled old Matthew. "We could have killed him then, with pleasure, the two of us, for bein' such a vagabond! Well, well, now, and do you know about that? Well, well, now!"

This was the first warm speech Hugh had heard from him, and after it the old man's heart seemed to open. He spoke of many happenings of the olden days, and described in detail all the wonderful improvements Eric Lindsay had effected in his inheritance. But of the cause of this effect he would not speak with aught but bitterness. He could not forget that Estelle Deykmann had been a pedler's daughter.

"And it does seem that God knows best what He does," said Matthew Horton. "'Twouldn't have been right for any but a true Lindsay to come here in the Manor—'twas as well they had no children."

"If they had had children it would have saved a good many people a lot of misery," said Hugh, sharply. "Two young men might be honest, useful citizens, rather than dead and buried—one far away from all who ever knew or cared for him."

"You mean Mr. Laurence, sir?" asked Matthew. "'Twas yesterday Master Eric told me of it. It's mighty hard to believe it," with a shake of his head. "Mighty hard to think we'll never see his handsome, happy face again."

Hugh was surprised. There must have been more to the dead and gone and disgraced heir than he had yet heard, since people so unlike bore him in kindly remembrance still.

"I mean to go to see his mother before I return home," said Hugh. "Poor woman! She must be sad at heart at losing both her sons. Does she know of Laurence's death yet?"

Matthew gave him a peculiar glance.

"I don't think so, sir—they won't tell her, either. She isn't very strong-minded, poor lady, and she is in sore trouble over Mr. Harold. I wouldn't go to see her, sir."

"Why?" asked Hugh, bluntly. But Matthew instead of answering, pointed down into the valley with his riding-stock.

“ See them white towers over there, sir? That’s Clayton. Many a ride I took to Clayton with Mr. Laurence, sir. He *could* ride, and he was so handsome and so soft-spoken, and as brave as a lion in his way. Only for one thing—”

He paused for a moment and Hugh supplied the word.

“ His carelessness?” he questioned.

Old Matthew raised his shoulders deprecatingly.

“ Put it that way, sir. One can’t expect a Lindsay to look into money matters,” he said. “ They can’t all be King-what-do-you-call’ems, with gold at their finger-tips! Poor Mr. Laurence! Never was he too high and mighty to have any but kind words for everybody. Mr. Harold’d treat you like dirt—but not Mr. Laurence. Even the little niggers—he loved to see their white teeth shining out of their black faces, he said. As for the house—There’s been no life in it—only misery since he left. I told Master Eric, though he was like to kill me for it, that there’d be naught but heartbreak and trouble till he came back to us again. And my words are coming true.”

“ He can never come back now, poor fellow.”

“ Never, sir, never. Ah, those were the times! He was that gay, sir, he’d laugh at you and with you—and the women used to go on errands to pass the drawing-room so they could hear him. And when he sang—oh, he *could* sing! He played the violin—like a master they said. I never heard no master—only Mr. Laurence. And he could make me cry or laugh with it, just as he pleased.”

“ Did Uncle Eric like him?” asked Hugh, in a low voice.

“ Ah, sir, he can tell me what he wants to, but half his heart went when Mr. Laurence turned against him. He ain’t been the same since, never. I think, sometimes—” he roused himself and looked at Hugh apologetically. “ I’m a foolish old man, sir—these are sad stories to be telling the future master of Lindsay.”

“ Do not call me that, good Matthew,” said Hugh, gravely. “ I have no desire to share in the wealth of this house, believe me. I am proud of it—yes. But a Lindsay without a dollar is as much a man as the wealthiest.”

"More," said old Matthew, moodily, "more. Wealth ain't everything, Mr. Hugh. And as for you coming here next, Master Eric says you it will be, and he speaks now as if he knew his mind."

He turned the conversation into other channels, however, and Hugh listened patiently. He would have given a good deal to stand as high in this old man's favor as Laurence Lindsay did. He liked his honest face, his outspoken manner.

"I thought straightforwardness was dead," he said to himself. "It isn't. There may be hope for Lindsay Manor yet."

It was close to luncheon time when they came in through the Park gates and cantered up to the stables. Hugh gave his horse to the servant waiting for it, and made his way to the Terrace steps, intending to go through the greenery and avoid the front entrance. His purpose of the morning had never left him, and even now he was turning over in his mind what excuses he could invent to get away. He had had enough of this. He wanted to be back in Westport, sitting in Agatha's little rocker, with France on the floor beside him, and his mother like a sweet white angel brooding over him. And thinking these thoughts he raised his head with a start to see his uncle watching him. He smiled cordially and advanced to take the seat beside him. Now was his opportunity, perhaps. But Eric Lindsay rose.

"I had rather stretch my limbs a bit," he said. "It is delightfully cool out here and it still lacks twenty minutes to lunch. How do you like Lindsay?"

"I can not tell you," said Hugh. "I can not describe my sensations—words are inadequate."

"Matthew showed you everything?"

"Everything—he is quite a character, isn't he?"

"Matthew? Yes. But about Lindsay. Do you know how much income it brings a year? How much would you suppose?"

"Enormous, judging from the many sources from which you can derive profit," said the young man in the dry, curt manner his uncle had learned to know well within this last three days. "It is splendidly managed. Do you attend to all the details yourself?"

"Principally. Old Matthew is my right hand man, and he

has one or two good people under him. There are several things I should like to explain to you about the place, Hugh—I want you to be thoroughly acquainted with—”

“I shall not be here long enough,” said Hugh, pleasantly. “My three days are up, uncle, and I must really leave you. Don’t be offended with me—can’t you understand that I do not covet Lindsay? Empty-handed I came to you and empty-handed I wish to go away. If you can care for me as your brother’s son, well and good. I shall like you, and I do, as my uncle, not the master of the Manor.”

“You needn’t be thrusting your confounded independence down my throat every time I open my mouth,” growled Uncle Eric, with a return of his old irritability. “Poor and proud of it—it makes me sick to listen to you. For heaven’s sake let me get a word in edgewise. I want to speak about the future.”

“I will listen.”

“It is needless to say that I am much more prepossessed in your favor than I thought to be when I sent you that telegram. The way things are at present, I see no reason why the Manor and all its appurtenances won’t some day belong to you—and I want you to consider this, young man. Now tell me frankly and candidly what you need. What is there you want to do? And how much money would you want to do it?”

The tone, the manner, above all, the offer itself, surprised Hugh, and amused him. He threw back his head, with one of his hearty laughs.

“I bought a return ticket,” he said. “I have no debts—there is nothing that money can get me. I am in a good position, with fine prospects if I stick to what I am doing. Forgive me, Uncle Eric—I don’t want to seem unkind—but I need nothing.”

“Are you thinking of—of marrying?” asked Uncle Eric, watching him narrowly.

“No,” said Hugh, frankly. “I have never yet met any one I would care to marry.”

A look of satisfaction crossed the old man’s face.

“She must be high-born and beautiful and a credit to the

house of Lindsay," he murmured, half-aloud. "You can have your pick of the county, Hugh."

Again Hugh laughed.

"When the time comes— Well, I can afford to wait. I have my mother to take care of. That is enough to put marriage out of my head for a while."

"She will be a Protestant," said Uncle Eric, who was too old to learn not to tread on forbidden ground. "Catholicity is all very well in its way, but the mistress of Lindsay—"

"Is Aunt Estelle—and a stanch enough Protestant she," cut in Hugh incisively. "My mother is a Catholic—I am one. I do not believe in marrying outside my own Church."

"Well, well, we can discuss that later," said the old man. It was wonderful what influence the younger had gained over his haughty spirit. "It is ten minutes to lunch time, and I daresay we had better go in. I should like to hear you describe Lindsay when you get home."

"As I tell you now—it will hardly be possible," said Hugh, earnestly. "France and Phil—why, I can see them. They would go crazy if they were turned loose here. Queer kids they are—always discovering new places and new scenes to visit. Compo Beach is right near us, you know—a great many camping parties go there during the summer, and nothing would do those adventurous children but to camp out, too, last year. They dragged mother with them—in fact, they take the poor woman on the most awful jaunts. I've known her to walk ten miles with Phil to see a marvelous apple tree some farmer raised—I forget what was marvelous about it now. I used to put a stop to such journeys when I was home, but lately I hear things are worse than ever. Phil is building—that kid, mind you!—or intending to build, a one-room cabin on the shores of the Saugatuck, he and a chum of his, and mother has offered to fit it up for them. He has conceived this great scheme because he wants to throw a line out of the window and haul in his breakfast while he is putting on his clothes. Now what do you think of that?"

It was a long time since his uncle had laughed so heartily.

"Fishing is—or used to be—one of my favorite pastimes," said he. "Lend me Phil for a month or two, if your mother can spare him, and we'll see how—"

He was interrupted by a shrill and angry voice—so very shrill and loud and impatient that Hugh had some difficulty in recognizing in it Mrs. Lindsay's languid tones.

"You are a saucy, miserable, ungrateful girl!" screamed she, at the top of her lungs. "Your tongue is double-edged—one can not say a word to you but you fly out like a tempest."

"My tongue is my own," retorted Gertrude. "You have no authority over me. Uncle Eric is my guardian, not you."

"Uncle Eric, indeed! You forget yourself! My husband isn't a drop's blood to you—though it suits you to claim kinship with a Lindsay!"

"There is no need for me to claim kinship with a Lindsay," cried Gertrude, passionately. "Nor do I need the Lindsay name to shield my peasant birth."

There was silence. Then came the sound of a sharp slap. Uncle Eric, blue with anger, started to go into the greenery. Hugh drew back just as a little figure in white came flying out, almost overturning Uncle Eric in her haste. She did not see Hugh—but he caught a glimpse of her blazing eyes. She was holding her hand to her cheek.

"What a scene!" said Uncle Eric. "These women, these women! As if a man had not enough to worry him without this eternal bickering and fault-finding— Go after Gertrude, Hugh, and try to quiet her."

Hugh turned obediently, rather sorry for his uncle. What a pleasant state of affairs! And how vulgar! All the refinement of his nature was offended now, but still he went on, looking from right to left for the girl. He turned into the chestnut walk. He did not know where she had gone, and he did not intend to search for her very zealously. He had not the slightest inclination to intrude his probably unwelcome presence upon her.

He caught sight of her just then, seated under one of the chestnut trees that lined the road. Her little head was resting

against its rough coat; her eyes were closed, her face was very pale, and on the cheek turned toward him the print of fingers was plainly visible. She did not hear Hugh coming and he stood watching her for some minutes before he spoke. He had been angry with her a moment ago, but now she seemed so childish and forlorn that his heart grew tender. Presently she opened her eyes and looked at him.

"Where did you come from?" she asked, smiling a little faintly, and scrambling to her feet. "I have walked too much this morning, and I feel so funny. Isn't it time to go into the house?"

"We are five minutes late for lunch now," he said. "But you are ill," as she tottered back against the tree, and stood so a moment for support. "You are quite pale, child."

"Yes," she answered.

He felt some embarrassment. After all it was no concern of his—she evidently did not know that he had heard anything of the quarrel, and did not mean to tell him of it either. "Can I do anything for you?" he asked, quietly. "Come, take my arm, lean on me. You are trembling. Why, what a weak little girl you are, after all. Now, tell me all about it—yes, I know. What is the matter between you and Aunt Estelle?"

"You heard?"

"Only a part of it."

Her face crimsoned.

"We had some angry words—she said I just was pretending to be sweet to uncle last night—Oh, she said lots of things!" she whispered in a low voice. "Things I won't tell you. And I was dreadfully angry and I said—She slapped me, Cousin Hugh!" with flashing eyes. "I shall never speak to her again. I am going away."

"Going away? Where?"

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know." She wrung her hands together. "Last night I went to bed so happy. Your coming had made so much difference. Uncle Eric loved me—I know he did, and I loved him and I loved you—and Aunt Estelle and every-

body. I prayed for poor Laurence and Harold with all my heart and soul. I was a good girl last night. And now I am a nasty, miserable, wicked creature! I hate Aunt Estelle! I will say it, I will say it," she cried, passionately. "I hate her, I hate her, I hate her, I hate her! There! She poisons every bit of happiness I ever have." She was shaking.

"Suppose we talk things over," said Hugh, very quietly. "Sit down here, come, now—and we'll see how matters stand. In the first place, little cousin, there is one thing you seem to forget—always."

He took her cold hand in his, patting it as his mother did his own, when she wanted to show her sympathy. Gertrude looked at him with suspicious eyes. She was not in the mood for a lecture just then.

"What is it?"

"Aunt Estelle is older than you," he said. "Now—don't speak. Wait a moment. She sees in you an advantage she has never possessed—your birth. She is the wife of the most powerful man in the county—but that can not give her the distinction she covets. I, for my part, think Uncle Eric has the best of the bargain—yes, I do. And I think the people who presume to turn up their noses at Aunt Estelle—even the very servants dare to do it—should look into matters a little before being quite so hasty. Could she help her birth? And don't you suppose that if God had intended her for any other place in life He would have put her into it?"

"Yes," said Gertrude.

"By one thing a lady is known—I need not tell you that it is her perfect self-control. Aunt Estelle, truly enough, will never possess this. But you ought. It is outrageous that Gertrude Waring should bandy words like the vulgarest scold in the town."

Her head drooped a little.

"Aunt Estelle is old now, Gertrude. We shall all be old and cranky and peculiar some day. It behooves us to think of that time."

"But you yourself got angry when Uncle Eric *hinted* at leav-

ing you Lindsay," she cried out. "He only *hinted* at it! Why should I stand—"

"Between men things *go* differently," said Hugh, gravely. "My circumstances are not the same as yours. There is another factor, too. You are the only Catholic here. Miss Mildred told me last night that she does not believe in God, and from the actions of the others—"

"Aunt Estelle goes to church—so does Uncle Eric."

"Not to our Church. You must set the example. You must be patient. Just think how grievously you have belied your Catholic name to-day. My dear child—"

"Oh, Cousin Hugh," she said, impulsively. "Help me, help me. I should be good if you were here to help me. But you are going away. Take me to your mother, Hugh, just for a little while, until I learn how to control myself. I have been dreaming of your mother all night long—and my heart is just aching to see her—just aching. Let me go to her, Hugh—only for one little week, and I'll be good forever after."

He looked down into the pleading, beautiful child face with perturbed gaze. Why not? It would be well for her to get away from here—from this great, lonely house, from Aunt Estelle, and the ice-cold Mildred, into the warmth of a home life such as she had never known. He felt certain his mother would make no objection. But—

"Uncle Eric loves you, Gertrude," he said. "He might not like to let you go. And our house—well, it would be different for you there. My sisters have no maids to stitch for them and to wait on them. They make their own clothes and help to cook. You would find it very different—"

"They love each other," she broke in, impetuously. "One doesn't sit by herself painting or embroidering all morning. The other doesn't lie in bed until noontime reading novels. Horses and dogs are good companions," she said, sighing. "But one can't talk to *them* forever. I am just stagnating. We see people—yes. We go calling and we drink tea or chocolate, and go away—and they come and do the same thing and they go away. Do you

wonder that, thrown back upon myself, I am growing wickeder and wickeder?"

"Aren't there any poor people to go to see—no church work to be done?" asked Hugh, trying to think of what his sisters did to occupy their spare time and racking his brains in vain.

"I am idle, I know—idle and careless. But you will let me go to your home, Hugh?" She put both hands about his arm and looked up coaxingly into his face with her great brown eyes.

"Yes, Gertrude. My mother will write to Uncle Eric herself and invite you, and you will be a welcome little guest," he said. "But on one condition."

"What is it? I will do any—"

"That you will apologize to Aunt Estelle for your hasty words—and that you will not quarrel with her again."

Her hand stole up to her cheek.

"Oh, Hugh, she—struck me."

"Then you don't want to come to see my mother?"

"I do, you know I do. I won't quarrel with her any more—I won't say another angry word. But must I—must I *apologize*? It wasn't—all my fault." She hung her head like the child she was. "She started it, she—"

"Think how pleased Uncle Eric will be when his little girl walks up to her aunt with such sweet words on her lips. Come now, pluck up courage. If it is her fault, think—you can heap coals of fire on her head."

"I will, then, I just will," she said. "But not for Uncle Eric—nor for her. But for you, because you ask me to, and because I want to see your mother—and I'll never quarrel with her any more. Do you know, Hugh, I feel good again—really? If you hadn't come I should have been bad and wicked all day long."

"Let's go to lunch, then," said Hugh, inwardly hugging himself to think what a diplomat he was becoming. "I'm out here preaching and if Uncle Eric is waiting— Phew! we'll catch it. Half an hour late. Can you run, Gertrude?"

"Can I run? I'll beat you to the end of the chestnut walk."

"No, you won't."

"Yes, I will." And she did, and they went into the big dining-room laughing, Gertrude heedless that her curls were tossed and her face glowing—all hot and perspiring and happy. Uncle Eric looked very black indeed as he told the butler to serve luncheon, and Aunt Estelle had a most vinegary expression upon her face. Gertrude drew her breath a little sharply through her shut teeth, held her head up high, and walked straight to the older woman with outstretched hand.

"I have come to apologize, Aunt Estelle," she said. "Will you forgive me for my hastiness this morning? I am awfully sorry I was so rude—and—and mean to you. And I'll never do it again."

Hugh had not bargained for that last penitent expression, and felt his lips twitch, but the seriousness of the moment restrained him. Uncle Eric's brow cleared as Aunt Estelle took the proffered hand. He did not mind the late luncheon then, and while his wife could not really appreciate what Gertrude's words cost her, she at least was grateful to her for thus lightening the atmosphere. She was not a bad or cruel woman at heart, only she was old and childless and little things disturbed her. And Gertrude, generally, was the one on whom she visited all offenses.

"Isn't Miss Mildred any better?" asked Hugh, courteously now, when he saw that her place was still vacant.

"She will go for a ride this afternoon some time," said Mrs. Lindsay, almost carelessly, Hugh thought. "A slight indisposition."

"No afternoon ride for me," said Gertrude, gaily. "The morning, the fresh, sweet morning, when the flowers are just waking up and the sun hasn't swallowed all the fragrance of the dawn. Give me a ride then for true enjoyment."

Hugh smiled in sympathy.

"Ever see my horse?" she asked. "Such a beauty as he is—a great, big black fellow with a mane like silk. And he can go, I tell you. I love horses."

After that the conversation became general and genial.

* * * * *

Luncheon was over and Hugh was going up the stairs to his own room, when one of the maids stopped him.

"Miss Mildred would like to show you some books, *sir*," she said. "And wants to know, if you are not engaged, would you come to her boudoir?"

"Immediately," he answered, following the girl, wondering not a little at the strange request. Mildred's apartments were on the floor above his own. When he entered he was surprised to see that the room was unoccupied, but the girl went at once to announce his presence. He noticed with a sense of pleasure the extreme simplicity—almost bareness—of furnishing that prevailed. It seemed in keeping with Mildred herself—it was so cold, so ascetic. He was standing gazing out of the window at the Park when she spoke to him. He turned quickly, and it was well his features were in shadow, for while he repressed the exclamation that rose to his lips, he could not conceal the startled expression that swept across his face. He had seen her but yesterday, yet this was a woman who looked ten years older than the Mildred Powell he had known. There were big black circles under her eyes—the whole countenance was strained and white and pitiful.

"You should see a physician," he exclaimed, involuntarily. She turned her eyes away.

"No one can help me," she said. "Please do not remark my appearance. Here are the books—they are the latest, I believe." She put her hand to her forehead wearily. "Sit down, please, and look at them in case Aunt Estelle should chance to come in. That was an excuse for seeing you alone." He seated himself in the chair she designated and she took one opposite him. "I have sent for you because—because I think you are a good man," she said abruptly. "Because when I listened to you yesterday I acknowledged to myself that I—believed you. I have disliked you very much—I thought at first you had come to take Lawrence's place." Her head sunk on her breast, her voice became almost indistinct. "Oh, forgive me that thought. I have no one else to turn to, and they must know nothing."

He was too astonished to speak—he could but sit there and stare dumbly at her, wondering.

“It is a shame for a woman to stand before a man—and confess—to a love—that was never returned,” she said, sighing, and the color crimsoned her white face. “Laurence never cared for me—that way, and I—I loved him. I always hoped he would come back. Last night when Uncle Eric said—Oh, I can’t say it, I can’t say it! What am I doing here when he whom I loved so is dead?”

Her body shook with uncontrollable sobs. She threw up one arm to hide her face from view, but Hugh, in pity, turned his eyes away and kept them so.

“This scene is distressing you,” she said after a while. “Uncle Eric will listen to you, I am sure—you are a stranger to me—Oh, I don’t know what I am saying! Forgive me if I plead I am only a woman whose heart is broken, and as such claim your kindness and consideration, for your mother’s sake,” she added in a half-whisper, “for your mother’s sake.”

“I give both for your own,” he said, his voice vibrating. “Believe me, I am sorry for you with all my soul.”

“Thank you—I believe you,” she answered. “But do not waste sympathy on me. I am strong—this first sorrow will soon pass away. I want you to get me news of how—he died. Can you? Write to Mr. Banks and ask him—he will tell you. And let me hear from you then. I must know all myself—or I shall die, too. And there is one other thing—”

“Yes?”

“Could you induce Uncle Eric to have him brought home here? He loved Lindsay so, poor fellow—he often said he could not rest happy if he were buried anywhere but at Lindsay. Will you ask Uncle Eric to do this thing? He will not for me—I have never cared for him. I have hated him and been unkind to him since—Laurence went. And the only reason I stayed on was because of the hope that some day might see him back again.”

She paused. Her voice was stifled, and there was silence in the room. Hugh stood aghast at this revelation of sorrow. The

thought of refusal never came to him. He was pondering even then how to broach the subject to his uncle. His heart ached for the unhappy girl who sat before him, a wreck of the beautiful statue of yesterday.

"I shall do my very best," he said. "I shall find out how Uncle Eric heard the news—I shall write to Banks and tell you everything. Or better still, perhaps I can discover it this afternoon, and if you come down to dinner I will find means to convey the information to you. It is miserable to sit up here and brood over your sorrow alone. If you had some one—Gertrude—"

"Do not give me good advice," she protested. "I—can not bear it. I have trusted you—I will ask you to keep my secret, and I have never asked favor from living man before."

"I understand," said Hugh, rising. "If I get the chance—But I shall make it. I wish I could help you," he added, in a wistful tone. For all his life long his heart had ever been tender toward the weak and suffering.

"You have, you have!" She held out her hand to him. "Even if you do not succeed, you have helped me."

Once out of the room, Hugh began turning over in his own mind how best to approach Uncle Eric on this most difficult of all subjects. At the end of the corridor he came upon the door leading into the picture gallery. Some sudden impulse made him enter. Walking down the length of the hall, he saw the very man of whom he had been thinking. Absorbed, his uncle stood before the picture of Laurence Lindsay.

"Some one in this house cares for that fellow," he said, abruptly, as Hugh approached him. "As often as we lay the ghost the ghost rises. Well, I'll have it hung on the wall now. It won't do any harm. What a beautiful face he had, hadn't he, Hugh? You couldn't blame an old man for loving him?"

"No, sir; I could not," answered Hugh, promptly. "There must have been something lovable about his personality. And I was just thinking of him. Do you mind if I tell you my thoughts?"

"Not at all," said Uncle Eric, still with gaze fastened on

the handsome dark face, the glowing eyes that looked with almost life-like fire out of the canvas.

“Would it not be a courteous act, now that he is dead, to sink all differences between you—to forgive him everything?”

“Why, I have forgiven him,” said Uncle Eric. “I wouldn’t hold anything against Laurence now. Harry is different. Laurence was bad—but that last chap!”

“Yet he is buried at Lindsay,” said Hugh, as if thinking aloud. “And the other poor fellow’s body lies forgotten—in a forgotten grave—in a forgotten country.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, to tell you the truth, that it would be a gracious and kindly act to bring Laurence Lindsay home.”

The old man stood silent a moment; then he looked from the pictured face to Hugh, and ground his foot savagely into the floor.

“I will not!” he said. “I will not do it! He left of his own free will—let him abide where he lies.”

He swung around and strode toward the door. He hesitated a moment on the threshold, looking back at the young man who stood gazing after him.

“I will not!” he almost shouted, and this time his voice was choked with rage. “He has met the fate he deserves—he is well-paid. He shall never come back to Lindsay—I have sworn it. Dead or living, he and I are parted forever.”

And then Hugh knew that the bitter old man loved Laurence Lindsay still, and that there were two aching hearts in the Manor that beautiful May day.

CHAPTER VII.

THREE LETTERS.

“ ALL hail to the chief—all hail to the chief, all hail to the chief! What is the next? Quick, quick, somebody!” shouted Phil, as he burst into the dining-room, with his books slung across his shoulder. “ ‘Tis you, brother Hugh, future master of Lindsay Manor, pride of our uncle’s heart, possessor of wealth untold! I have the honor to salute you, most noble, most high, and most mighty—”

His peroration was interrupted by the laughing elder brother, who grabbed him up in his strong arms and bore him, struggling and kicking, to the sofa, where he put him down and promptly sat on him.

“ Will you be good, you reckless young scamp?” he cried, as the boy squirmed like an eel in vain endeavors to get away from him. “ And don’t poke any more fun at a poor, luckless, unfortunate fellow, who—”

“ What’s that?” asked Phil, lying quiet suddenly. “ Aren’t we going to move to South Carolina?”

“ We are not!” answered Hugh, emphatically. “ Keep right ahead with your building plans, young man. No South Carolina for yours or mine, either. My visit to the land of the myrtle and magnolia hasn’t made a bit of difference, except—”

He looked about the room, from one side of it to the other. A shadow crossed his forehead, and he slid down on the sofa and let Phil get up.

“ What is it?” asked the mother, a little anxiously, looking up from the mending spread out upon her lap.

“ Oh, nothing, mother,” he answered, giving her a meaning

glance, and she knew his confidences were kept for some future period.

"Gee! All the fellows asked me to let 'em come down and see me once in a while," said Phil, disconsolately. "And I promised 'em I would, too. And Jim Hawkins he traded his big four-blader for my old fishing-pole 'cause he was going to be the first one invited."

"Indeed!" said Hugh. "You had no right to speak of things that in no way concerned you! A nice position you've placed me in if you've gone babbling nonsense all over town! What do you mean?" he finished, more irritably than he knew.

"It hardly seems possible that Uncle Eric let you go without saying anything to you?" put in Agatha, in her soft, low voice. "He wrote mother the very nicest letter, and he praised you so and said so much in your favor that we scarcely expected to see you home again for a long time."

"He wrote to mother?" asked Hugh, in astonishment. "He never said a single word to me."

"I'll get the letter for you afterward," said Mrs. Lindsay. "Talk to us about the place, dear. Is it pretty?"

"Wonderful, mother. I told Uncle Eric I should not know how to begin—and I don't. I think they were all sorry to see me go—even Aunt Estelle. I rather like Uncle Eric, mother—he isn't like father much, as I remember him. He is stouter and bald at the temples, and from scowling so much his eyebrows are drawn together. He has eyes like father when he smiles, which is very seldom. His mustache and hair are quite white."

"What is Aunt Estelle like?" asked Agatha, curiously.

"A pale, fair-haired woman, always tired," answered Hugh, graphically. "In the gallery there is a picture of father when he was a boy like Phil here. I am sure you'll love to see it, mother. I got in one day by myself and made a sketch of it. It's in my bag—I'll get it for you. You can see Phil's very nose in it—the nose you all make fun of. Never mind, Phil, that's going to be a nose like father's one of these days—at least, if you can keep it long enough out of other people's concerns. And Agatha,

your picture is there, too, only you are dressed in the style of eighty years ago. She is exactly like grandmother, so quaint and pretty"—Agatha smiled in a self-satisfied, conscious way—"and so altogether prim and precise and correct, you know," added this very real older brother in a mincing tone, speaking to his mother, but watching, with a twinkle in his eye, the self-satisfied smile suddenly disappear from the pretty mouth.

"But don't you yourself think it funny Uncle Eric let you go without saying something definite?" said France after a minute, from her favorite position on the floor at his knee, gazing up at him with quiet wisdom gathered from her elders.

"Now, children, I'm going to put you on your honor. Is it all right?" He looked down at her and then at Phil, inquiringly, for "on their honor" meant that the speech to come was sacred to the family circle and was on no condition to be repeated outside the home precincts.

"On my honor," said Phil, and France nodded assent.

"Well, then, I hadn't been there one day when Uncle Eric and I came to an understanding. He placed me on a level with his other nephews, and thought to command me and lord it over me in the same fashion. But he found out that there was a slight—a very slight—difference."

"Hurrah!" shouted Phil. "Hurrah for my brother Hugh!" He took his hand and shook it hard.

"Treat those fingers gently," advised Hugh, rubbing them with mock gravity. "They've been shaken by the Governor of South Carolina since I went away."

"Never!" cried France, looking at him in admiration.

"Humph! Don't see any difference! Ain't any smaller, nor no prettier," said Phil.

"I hope you weren't too abrupt toward Uncle Eric?" asked Mrs. Lindsay now. "You speak so harshly at times, Hugh—when you do not really mean it."

"Mother!" Hugh looked at her in some surprise. "Don't let the serpent bite you, too. No money for me that isn't earned by my own efforts. You girls," he looked about him and at them.

“ You girls are the happiest I have ever met, and I wouldn’t exchange this one little room for all the Manor wealth. Come over here, mother, near to me, and let me tell you what lesson your big son has learned since he went out into the wide, wide world—meaning Lindsay.”

And then, with those he loved clustered about him, he began to describe the things that he had seen. At first his words were sharp and crisp, as became a man who talked business six months of the year, and was home but five days now on holiday. But with the love of nature at his heart, he warmed to the self-imposed task. He described the beautiful parks and drives, the great orchards, the fields under cultivation, the wealth of foliage, tinted in lavish colors of green and gold and crimson, the beautiful walks, the brilliant birds, the gardens, the gorgeous flowers, the splendid horses. And then the house itself, with its age-mellowed furniture, its luxurious fittings, its tapestried walls, its marvels of statuary, its rare collection of wonderful paintings—treasures of art a city would have been proud to possess. He described the rooms they had given him—his rooms, they were to be called thereafter, and the mother’s eyes kindled. He talked until he had them in his power, filled with the glory of their ancestral home, thrilling with the thoughts it brought to them, until they, too, in silent rapture, walked with him in fancy, and saw things as he unfolded them in all their beauty, one by one. They did not ask a single question—they had been taught to be good listeners, these Lindsays.

And then, when he saw in their faces that they were with him heart and soul, he described his entrance to this luxury. He brought them into the presence of the dead man lying in solemn state, with the candles at his head and at his feet, the candles that in our Catholic faith speak so vividly of our belief in future resurrection—but which here meant nothing—a relic from Catholic times long since forgotten, a tradition fulfilled because the Lindsays had been laid out so from time immemorial. Here that dead man lay in silent pomp of death—alone. He told them of his uncle, straight and strong and proud, and imperious yet, but

nearing the grave at that, walking through his beautiful palace, wrapped up in things material—alone. His aunt, with her thin veneer of breeding, her great respect for birth, her overweening sense of the proprieties, her ignorance of all that constituted life's true sweetness, understanding not her husband, understood not of him—ever alone.

Then, his voice falling to a minor key, he described Mildred—and his knowledge of her woful secret made him tender. He told them how she shunned visitors, how cold she was, how proud, how silent, and yet how beautiful. He told them of Gertrude, the little child, the spoiled girl, the cynical woman, who laughed and wept in a breath, and lived a butterfly existence, doing her poor little puny best, according to her lights, to make things lovable and homelike. He spoke of her passionate temper, her wilfulness, her forgiving little ways. His mother's eyes filled with tears. France put her head down on his knee with a sob.

And when he ceased finally, their silence spoke more loudly than words could have done. Agatha leaned back in her chair with a long breath.

“How sad!” she murmured. “How very, very sad!” She looked at him, then at her mother, and her hand stole softly into that mother's tender clasp. “Love is best after all, mamma dear,” she said, with a childishness that sometimes made the mother think her girl was only pretending to be grown up. “Love is the only thing in the world.”

Mrs. Lindsay leaned over and kissed her.

“Love is the only thing in the world, indeed—I am glad to hear my worldly daughter say that,” she answered. “Thank God for love, dear—the most precious gift He has given us.”

“I think,” said Hugh now—he was stroking France's hand, while she tried to wipe her tears away with the other unseen—“that Uncle Eric cares for Gertrude—more perhaps than he would like to show.”

“I should imagine so, Hugh. Perhaps I can enlighten you a little. Years ago your uncle was in love with her mother.”

“With Gertrude's mother? What happened?”

“ Ambition stepped in. She was comparatively poor. Estelle Deykmann held the money-bags and Uncle Eric decided in her favor. Your father often told me of it. It seems the honor of the Lindsays was dearer to him than his happiness.”

“ He is the most unhappy man I ever met,” said Hugh, slowly. “ I wonder if that is why—who was her mother? ”

“ Her name was Constance Drew. She was a very sweet girl—perhaps her daughter is like her. She married many years after she and Eric parted, and she had but one child, Gertrude. Her husband was wealthy enough when they were first wed, but he lived the life of a gentleman, and never cared where money went or what became of it. Some sort of epidemic carried both off—within a week of each other. Uncle Eric took the child—she was only about two years old, and sent her away for a short time to be educated. I heard there was very little left for her—”

“ She herself believes that she has a small income.”

“ Oh, does she? Perhaps she has. At any rate he brought her back to the Manor before the good nuns had much chance to teach her anything. I am not surprised that she is undisciplined.”

“ So that is Uncle Eric’s romance!” said Hugh. “ I wondered why he looked at her so tenderly. Poor old fellow! It is good for him to have a gleam of poetry in his bitter life—but it’s bad for the girl. I wish you’d ask her here, mother, for a few weeks. She is wild to meet you all.”

“ Willingly, indeed,” assented the mother. “ Poor little child! I love her already, Hugh. When—”

“ Oh, not yet—not yet. Let me enjoy my vacation, and get the taste of Lindsay Manor out of my mouth,” said Hugh, making a wry face. “ I’ve had enough of stranger people for a while.”

“ She isn’t *the* girl, then? ” said Phil. “ I thought she was *the* girl from the way he talked, didn’t you, mother? ”

Hugh threw back his head and laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks.

“ It’s not at the imputation, not at all—I scorn it! ” he said. “ But look at the size of that youngster to be so suspicious! No girl for me, Phil. I haven’t the leisure to marry yet, so be con-

tent to have one bachelor in the family. Of course, any time you think yourself able to support a wife, why—”

“I often wonder what sort of a girl you will marry,” said Agatha, smiling, as Phil threw himself bodily on Hugh, and there seemed to be danger of an ignominious scuffle.

“When I can find one like mother,” he answered, holding Phil down with one hand and looking laughingly into his mother’s tender face. “There isn’t any such girl in the world as mother.”

“Oh, gee!” said Phil. “Just trying to get on mom’s right side. Hey, you’re twisting my ear off!”

“That *sounds* delightful!” said Agatha. “But wait until *she* comes along. Such things generally go by contraries. The girl you marry will probably be mother’s direct opposite.”

“Now, God forbid!” ejaculated Hugh, so fervently that they all laughed.

“I think so,” said Agatha, still smiling. “You see, I had made up my mind to marry some one—well, some one rough and ready like yourself, for instance, Hugh. You know—er—noisy, and loud, and all that sort of thing. And John Perry is *such* a gentleman!” She lifted her lashes at him with a sly twinkle of the eyes that spoke not a little for her sense of humor.

“That’s getting back at me for my ‘prim and precise and correct’ of a few minutes ago, isn’t it, sis?” asked Hugh. “Well, you can have the floor just now. But Gertrude, mother—no, you stay just where you are, Phil, until we finish this momentous question—you’re altogether too far in advance of the times.”

“She’ll find this an awfully poky place after the Manor,” said Agatha, with a little worried face. “We don’t care, of course—but it would be horrid, just *horrid* to have her come all this way and not enjoy herself.”

“She’ll enjoy herself, never fear. Why, sis, she has nothing but horses and dogs to talk to all day long. Uncle Eric is a very busy man—he must be, with that big place to attend to. And the other two—”

“We’ll just make her one of ourselves,” said France, gaily. “We’ll take her to our house in the woods—”

"*Our house in the woods!* Well, I never! Mother, did *you* hear that? *Our house in the woods!* Do you think we fellows—"

"Oh, not when the fellows are there, you booby. You'll show her the place, won't you? And be polite to her? Jim Hawkins will, if *I* ask him to—"

"Will he? Well, he won't, see? Jim Hawkins—"

"Oh, Phil, just think of a girl who hasn't got any brothers or sisters or no one *at all* to care for her!" cried France.

"Well, I don't care—I've got to see her first," said Phil, cautiously.

"Will you be home when she comes, Hugh?" asked Agatha.

"No; I won't. You are evidently thinking, with Phil, that I am interested in this little girl. Why, she's only a child just like France here."

"But you love me better than you do her?" remonstrated France.

"Such a silly question deserves no answer," said Hugh, trying to be stern. His mother got up to put away her mending, and Sue, opening the door, brought in the afternoon tea and put it on the table.

"There are some letters for you that came while you were away—one the day after you left, and the last one this morning," said Mrs. Lindsay. "Your arrival has put everything else out of my head, sonny boy."

(I know it sounds ridiculous to have a mother say that to her big, six-foot tall offspring, but they do say it, and they will say it, if he were eight foot and bald as an egg into the bargain. Mothers are all alike.)

"I've got another in my pocket," cried Phil, jumping up. "Excuse me, old fellow, I clean forgot it. Here it is. Post-marked—Hugh, it must be from Lindsay!"

"Lindsay!" said Hugh. "You're crazy. Why, sure enough! That's Uncle Eric's handwriting."

The tea was forgotten, and once more they scrambled about him and around him as he tore open the envelope and read the few short, businesslike lines.

"Now, what do you— How ridiculous! I told him— Mother, listen to this:

"I have placed \$5,000 to your account with Banks & Belding. Please use this for present needs, and trust to me for the future. Also write to Mr. Banks personally. He has some arrangements to make with you.' Great Scott, mother, what do you think of that?"

He sat down heavily on the sofa, his face a little pale, and the letter slipped from his trembling fingers—immediately restored to them by the eager France, though she and Phil nearly bumped heads in getting it.

"Oh, Hugh!" said the mother, almost with a sob. "It is true, then, true."

"But mother— Oh, pshaw! I won't have it and that's all there is about it! I told him distinctly— What are these other letters? Aarons & Mosheim? Humph! Who are they? Never heard of them in my life before. Lawyers—well!"

He drew his breath hard. A contemptuous smile curved the corner of his mouth.

"As we were able to do the late Harold Lindsay quite a number of favors in our line, we make bold to apply for your esteemed patronage.' Money-lenders! Mon—ey—lend—ers! The scoundrels, the rank, infamous scoundrels!"

"Thus is greatness thrust upon you," said Agatha, with a meaning smile.

"What does that mean?" asked Phil. "What are favors in their line, Hugh?"

"Never mind, boy. Here's another. Of all the confounded—I'm running in luck, I am. Skied, I suppose. I'll bet the chumps never saw it, let alone— What?" He turned pale in earnest this time, and his eyes glued themselves to the written sheet. His mother, alarmed at the pallor of his face, bent over his shoulder to read:

"Your little sketch, 'The Trysting-Place,' has been awarded first prize in the landscape exhibition at the Academy. Mr. John Duncan, the well-known connoisseur, whom you doubtless have

heard of, authorizes us to make you an offer of eight hundred dollars for this picture. Will you be good enough to let us hear from you as soon as possible?"

"I'm going out for a walk," said Hugh. "This is too much for a chap in one day. I'll have to get my wits together. Eight hundred dollars! Why, mother— Well, there's five hundred of it for you, dear, right away, so plan what you're going to do with it, quick! Eight hundred dollars! And for that sketch! It isn't worth fifty. Say—"

He made a rush for the door, banged it open, seized his hat and out with him. He had scarcely reached the gate ere Phil jumped up and ran after him. By that time Hugh was half way up the narrow street. "Hugh! Hugh!" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "Hugh!" Then as the young man paused and turned, he made a trumpet of his two hands. "Is the Governor of South Carolina on my honor?"

"No; but don't string it!" shouted Hugh, and away he went. Phil came back with a blissful expression on his face.

"I'd bust if I couldn't tell Jim Hawkins Hugh shook hands with him," he said to France.

"What a big boy he is!" laughed Agatha, picking up the scattered letters and laying them on the table. "Mother, I think Hugh is a wonderful fellow."

"Do you, dear?" asked the mother, quietly. "I have known it for twenty-eight years."

"He never said a word about the five thousand—only the eight hundred he earned himself," said Phil. "I hope, when I grow up, I'll be like Hugh."

"I hope so, too, dear. Money earned like this last windfall of Hugh's is very precious," she went on. "I, for my part, am glad—"

"Glad?"

"Glad he sees it the way he does. Thank God, the love of money will never eat out his heart. The curse of the Lindsays has not fallen on my Hugh."

"And now let's have some tea, mom? I'm half-starved."

CHAPTER VIII.

PASSING THE BOUNDARY LINE.

HUGH enjoyed the rest of his vacation thoroughly. He wrote to Mr. John Duncan and accepted his offer. He wrote to Uncle Eric and refused his—but in such gentle, almost loving, terms, that the old man could not be offended. He wrote to Banks & Belding, and in return received all the information that Mr. Banks had of Laurence Lindsay, and he sent their communication as he got it to Mildred Powell. He wrote to Gertrude, a rollicking, joyful, teasing letter, that the girl laughed over and cried over and carried in her pocket for a month before she laid it carefully away. Conscious, then, of duty well performed, he went out into the woods, bringing Phil with him, all those long May afternoons. And so his vacation passed.

It was wearing on to autumn. In Phil's eyes that summer had been a glorious success. His snug little house had been the coveted spot sought by "the fellows." There were the most woful Indian massacres perpetrated in that one lonely cabin. There were attacks by moonlight and by daylight. Once a dangerous outlaw hid himself within, and when the sheriff, with his trusty aides, rode up and surrounded the cabin and threatened to burn the bold brigand alive if he did not surrender he shot the brave sheriff dead in his tracks. (There had been a long quarrel about that shooting match. Jim Hawkins, the sheriff, said it wasn't right for him to be shot—he never heard of a leader being shot the very first of the game. He wouldn't mind getting shot later on and dying after nobly doing his duty. But Phil, who was the outlaw—and who, incidentally, owned three-fourths of the cabin—said he must die at that time, and die he did.)

As for the cabin itself, following Hugh's advice, he did not build it near enough the stream to carry out his boast of "fishing while dressing." He turned the thing around, and "dressed while fishing," for he carried his clothes with him to the river bank, and many a silvery perch found its way to the frying-pan those bright summer mornings.

Hugh went back to the city at the end of that momentous month, and now, though it was so near to autumn, he could not get the chance to run home, he said. He had been and was still extremely busy, and the illness of the senior member of the firm necessitated his strict attention to present duty. Long and loving letters came to his mother every week. He had very little time to himself. Uncle Eric expected a letter every week also, and it took all Sunday afternoon to keep up his correspondence. He would try to get home before the summer closed for a few days' jaunt with Phil.

Toward the end of July Gertrude arrived at Westport. Of what she did there, and of how she fared let the story tell. At any rate it was chiefly because of her that Hugh finally resolved to take "that trip home," and square up a matter that troubled him very much. So one bright Saturday morning in the middle of September he found himself tramping up the narrow plank road that led to the Lindsay cottage. He turned in at the gate, banged it shut after him, and came quickly up the graveled path. There was a girl's little figure, clad in gingham, with a big sunbonnet on her head, kneeling in front of the porch, a pair of scissors and a ball of cord beside her. She was tying up the drooping vines.

"Wait a minute, Phil, will you?" she called from under her sunbonnet. "Mother asked me to finish this—I won't be long now—"

Hugh laughed. There was nothing to equal Hugh's laugh—it rolled out so deeply and so heartily. She sprang to her feet, her face going white and red by turns. Then with a joyous cry she sprang into his arms and kissed him.

"Why, Hugh, Hugh," she cried, in rapture. "Oh, Hugh!"

"And oh, Gertrude!" he laughed, still holding her. "Well, of all the country lasses! My dear little girl, what a brownie you are!"

She wriggled away from him, breathless.

"Oh, I am so surprised, so overjoyed! It is so wonderful—"

"That I am here? Surely I can visit my mother—"

"But no one expects you! I did not think you could get away, dear Hugh. How did you manage it?"

"That is it—I just managed it. We'll talk of that later on—also of *why* I managed it. Let me look at you. What a witch you are in that sunbonnet. Dear me, you are only a baby yet, and I felt persuaded you were quite a young lady, judging from the nice, sensible letters I've been getting. Where did you get those dimples? And look at those brown hands! Not quite so white and dainty as they were at Lindsay—"

"But oh, much stronger, dear Hugh, much stronger and much happier and more capable."

"I am glad, little girl." He bent the grave, reproving glance she knew of old upon her as he spoke. "Yet I must scold you."

"Scold me? Oh, no, Hugh, please don't. I haven't seen you in so long—so very, very long. Please don't scold me."

He raised a warning finger.

"I must. And I'm going to do it now—right this minute and get it over. Look here, do you know Uncle Eric accuses me of conspiring against him? He writes to *me*—since he says writing to you is useless—and insists on me sending you home."

"Oh, Hugh!" The despair in her voice was too real—but he was prepared to steel his heart against this little creature who knew so well how to touch it.

"The very latest at the end of this week—the—very—latest! You have another seven days of Westport before you."

"Oh, Hugh!" she said again, but in such a disappointed, piteous, frightened little tone that he knew that if he listened to it he would simply take her in his arms and comfort her like the child she was.

"I can't understand you, Gertrude. I asked Uncle Eric to

lend you to us—lend us his only bit of comfort. You came. Do not let him think that we refuse to return you.”

She threw her hands up to her ears.

“Preaching again!” she said. “Just preaching, and I won’t be preached to—that is all. Hugh, Hugh, do let us forget that there is really such an awful possibility as my having to go back again. Oh! I have the most wonderful things to tell you—”

“I shall listen gladly,” he said in his gravest tones. “But in the end—”

“Oh, now, if you talk like *that*.” She took her hands away, and bent over her pruning again. “Thank you for reminding me that my stay here is likely to outwear my welcome—”

“You exasperating little thing!” said Hugh, gazing down at her. “Wouldn’t I like to shake you good and hard! What in the world is the matter with you, you silly baby? Think of Lindsay Manor and compare it to this house—”

“Which do you prefer?” she asked, looking up at him with flashing eyes.

“Why this—er—is—my home,” he answered, somewhat hesitatingly.

“Well, it’s been my home since I came into it,” she cried out. “I am a daughter here—I am no one there. They really love me here—they hate me there. There I have nothing—here, everything. Hugh, Hugh!” She sprang up with another quick change of tone. “Don’t be so hard-hearted—putting all the sweetness out of my life like this.”

“Gertrude, Gertrude, Gertrude!” he said. “I never thought that you could have so little feeling, so little regard for Uncle Eric. Aunt Estelle is not overkind I know, but my mother’s praises are few and far between—”

“Your mother is my good angel,” said Gertrude, half-sobbingly. “She scolds me—she says things to me that Aunt Estelle wouldn’t dare to. But while she says them she has her arms about me, and after her lecture she kisses me. And I kiss her in return, and I love her from the bottom of my heart. Why, I am always good now, Cousin Hugh, always. You can ask her if I—”

At that moment Mrs. Lindsay, hearing voices, came along the hall, and looked with surprised face at them from behind the screen door. The surprised look gave way to one of joyous welcome as Hugh bounded up the steps, and had her in his arms in a trice.

"Welcome, dear, welcome!" she said. "Why, Gertrude, what is the matter?" looking anxiously into the excited countenance, as the girl came slowly forward and stood near her.

"Uncle Eric writes and asks me to see that she goes home next week," said Hugh.

Mrs. Lindsay's face shadowed a little.

"Is that so? Well, my dear child, Uncle Eric comes first. He has prior claim on you."

The sunbonneted head drooped a trifle.

"It won't be long until you can come back again," went on the gentle voice. "Don't let it grieve you. And think how I shall miss my little daughter."

"Oh, you are sweet, you are sweet!" said Gertrude, kissing her. "There, Hugh, you see—"

"Put your scissors and things away," said Mrs. Lindsay. "I will hear what Hugh has to tell me about Uncle Eric, and you'll find me in the parlor in ten minutes. Come there to me—I want to talk to you."

"One has to be very careful with her," said Mrs. Lindsay, after the girl had gone. "She is such a kind-hearted, beautiful child—"

"But so headstrong, so wilful, so passionate—"

"That's just it, Hugh. Only one thing in the world can conquer her—affection. She can be led, but never driven."

"But she is *such* a baby," he protested. "One word, and she is crying or laughing, or both together."

"She has in her the makings of a splendid woman—only half her good qualities are asleep. She is as true as steel, as honest as the sun. Hugh, I can not tell you how dear she has grown to me this last few weeks. I am astonished at myself."

"But, mother, she must really go to Uncle Eric," he said,

rather anxiously. "It is a shame. She came for two weeks—and she's here seven."

"She will go, dear boy—and without question. Gertrude is like a child. Explain a thing to a child when you give it a command—don't order it to do things in the dark. I wish I could have her with me for the next year," sighing. "I know what her nature needs and could supply it."

Gertrude Waring had come to Westport with trepidation in her heart—anxious and yet timorous. From the very first there was no regret on either side. The wilful girl forgot that she was "bad," as she called it, under the gentle woman's sweetness. Agatha and she had not much in common. The older girl—not much older in years, but vastly older in self-knowledge and self-containment—was too much occupied with the making of her trousseau, and with her lover. But she was kind in her own way to the little stranger—"almost the Lindsay way," Gertrude told her frankly, thereby giving her great pleasure. France was delighted to have met one who was so enchanting a companion and so delightful a friend. Phil, too, soon discovered welcome traits in her that gave him a much higher opinion of girls in general. She was lively, like France, without her boisterousness. She could talk seriously when so minded. She knew all Southern wood-lore by heart, and it was vastly interesting to Phil to listen to her, as she walked with him and France to their cabin day after day, describing the differences between the Northern and Southern forests, in so far as she understood them. She could sing and she could play. She could mimic any one or anything with a face so grave that the very sight of it set them laughing. And soon she fell into the habit of calling Mrs. Lindsay "mother," and the word was sweet to her lips indeed. She anticipated her slightest wishes. Mrs. Lindsay often had to acknowledge to herself that this stranger girl was more thoughtful of her comfort than her own two. But they had grown up with the blessing of a mother's love, and Gertrude was just realizing what a blessing it was, and showing her gratitude for it. Seldom, indeed, do we appreciate the gifts of God until we miss them. Poor Gertrude strove hard to

model her conduct after that of her new-found mother. But she could not conquer every fault at once, and there were so many corners and angles to be rubbed smooth.

She came to the parlor now as she had been bidden—and found Mrs. Lindsay there alone. She felt very desolate, for she knew that the outcome of it all must be her return to Lindsay. A wee, small voice within her whispered it was but right that she should go—but to listen to that wee, small voice, she thought, would overwhelm her. At any rate, she paused now outside the door, trying to banish the unhappiness from her face, and she entered the room smiling. Mrs. Lindsay's tender heart ached when she saw that brave smile, for she knew how real Gertrude's little sorrows seemed to her.

"You came quickly," said Mrs. Lindsay. "Now sit down here beside me and let us have a talk. I am going to tell you a story—"

"Oh, mother, if I could but stay!"

"Dear little girl, much as I love you, it is impossible. Next year you will come again—"

"Next year!" Gertrude had never realized before how long a year was.

"Next year, little girl. Now, listen to me—I want your common sense and all your gentle heart for a few moments, until you see things in the right light. Uncle Eric loves you very dearly—he has loved you all your life. Don't you think you ought to return that love? He must be very lonely without you in that great, big house."

She sighed a little, but made no answer.

"Long years ago, dear, Uncle Eric cared for your mother very much. They would have been married, had not the curse of the Lindsays fallen so bitterly upon him. He married—some one else. Years afterward your mother met Lieutenant Waring. He was a splendid, generous-hearted man, and she really cared for him."

"Yes, mother." What a meek, submissive little voice it was.

"Uncle Eric never came in contact with your father or mother, dear, after that. Like a soldier and a hospitable man your

father kept open house. He was liberal, generous to a fault. His hand was ever in his pocket for those who were in want."

"I know that. Uncle Eric often says so."

"Does he? That is kind of him. Mr. Waring lost a good deal of money. His friends imposed on him. He sank a lot in speculation. Before he could realize that he was almost beggared, an epidemic swept both him and your mother away. Had the debts he owed been paid out of his little fortune, his baby girl would have been penniless. But an unknown friend came forward. With generous hand he saved the man's good name and settled everything. The little fortune was preserved intact for Gertrude Waring, the daughter of the woman he had loved, and no one was ever the wiser, not even his wife. For that unknown friend was Uncle Eric."

Gertrude sat looking at her with parted lips, tears shining in her eyes.

"Oh, and I never knew! Did he do that—honestly, truly, really, Uncle Eric did that?"

"Honestly, truly, really, dear. I know it to be true."

"Oh, I shall be so good to him—"

"That is right—that is the way I want to hear you talk. You must try to repay that kindly act of his. He is old, dear. If he made mistakes he has paid for them. He has been sorely tried. He loved your mother—he loves you. You can make his life a happy one—all rests in your hands. Tenderness and patience."

"Tenderness and patience!" she repeated. "Oh, if God would only give me those virtues, mother. And what shall I do when—I—am so far—away from you?"

"Think of me, I hope—and when you are hard-pressed and disappointed, try to remember I am praying for my little daughter." She hesitated a moment—then bending over she took the beautiful, innocent face between her palms. "I want to say something else to you, dear. Some day—I know not how soon or how late—your trial will come to you. But soon or late that trial must come—the trial that will make a woman out of my little girl. It may be a great sorrow, a great love, a great disappointment.

But it will fall upon you, dear, and on your reception of it depends your whole future. Child, only one thing I want you to do—only one thing."

"What is it?" the girl whispered, impressed by the seriousness of the loving face.

"Pay no heed to the black thoughts that come to you, then. Your only redemption lies in fighting them. Promise me to fight, not to yield one inch, and above all to pray."

"I promise," said the girl, solemnly. "Mother, I promise."

And neither of them knew or could have imagined how near that trial was, and in what shape it was to stretch across her future life.

* * * * *

That night Hugh had a chance to observe how much Gertrude was at home here. She was almost indispensable to France and Phil, and even the cold Agatha asked her advice. John Perry came in, teasing her, but she shook her bright head at him, and had such witty answers that Hugh, trying to read, laid aside his paper, finding a great deal more entertainment in this charming little human book spread out before him.

He was "company," he declared, and when they asked him to sing with them he shook his head. No; he had come to be amused, and if they didn't amuse him he'd go back to his own room. So Gertrude sat down to the piano. She had a sweet voice, that showed to best advantage in the sad little ballads his mother loved. She had these at her finger-tips—songs that one rarely hears nowadays: "Gaily the Troubadour," "Black-eyed Susan," "Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind," from "As You Like It." Then came Phil's favorites, and Hugh almost forgot he was "company" when the rollicking verses of "Father O'Flynn" rang out:

" Still, for all, you've so gentle a soul;
Gad, you've your flock in the grandest control!
Checkin' the crazy ones, coaxin' onaisy ones,
Liftin' the lazy ones on wid a stick!"

And she sung "Rory O'More" at John Perry's special request—

for he was Irish to the backbone, despite his American birth—"God, America, Ireland," his motto, as is the motto of so many of the children of Erin's children born on our free soil. But when they commenced "The Fine Ould Irish Gentleman," even Hugh made a dash for the piano, and the laughing crowd started all over again, singing at the top of their voices, rushing one word on top of the other in order to get them all in, breaking down to laugh, and trailing in at the end, one after the other, with:

"Was one of the rale—ould—stock!"

neither law nor order governing music or rhythm. She well knew what was coming next, did Mrs. Lindsay, for this was only one of similar evenings. The nonsensical, musical college songs were being tinkled out even now from under the quick, little fingers. "Crambambuli," and "My Clementine," and "Upidee," and

"You can't have any of my soft, sweet soda-crackers
When your soft, sweet soda-crackers are gone!"

She knew them all, and she listened smilingly. They sang until exhausted, and until Gertrude's little pipe was unable to make itself heard for very weariness, and she turned on the stool, laughing, and wiping the perspiration from her forehead. Feeling that they had had enough outlet for superabundant animal spirits, the rest of them went back to vacated chairs and sofas. And now came a very welcome announcement:

"There's some of the very nicest claret-lemonade on the table in the dining-room," said Mrs. Lindsay. "And Sue said that if Phil asked her she'd give him some cook—"

But France and Phil had disappeared, and a moment later the girl came back again with a huge plate of cookies, Phil carrying the pitcher of cold claret. He took so much pains to see that Gertrude was well supplied with refreshments that Hugh teasingly commented on it. But his brother did not look the least bit conscious.

"Gert is so good to us," he said, serenely. "It's the least we fellows can do to be nice back again."

When that evening was over, and Hugh said good night to his little protégée—for so he felt her to be—he held her hand and looked down at her almost tenderly.

“Talk about missing us!” he said. “I have never had a more enjoyable time in my life. What in the world will we do without you?”

She nodded her curly head and smiled brightly.

“It is my duty to go,” she said. “Mother says so—and I knew it right along, only, perhaps, I wanted her to say it. I have one more joyous week—and I sha’n’t stay until Monday. I’ll get home Saturday morning—it will look more gracious, I think, don’t you, mother? It will look as if I didn’t begrudge going.”

Mrs. Lindsay nodded approvingly, and Hugh thought within himself what real power his mother must possess to thus conquer such a wilful little being.

The next few days passed in a round of pleasure for them all. Agatha watched her brother and Gertrude in silence. She was firmly convinced that the girl loved Hugh, and in her somewhat worldly heart she disapproved of this fact very much. Perhaps part of the Lindsay curse had fallen on her, too, for she thought what a good thing it would be in the future if her brother, the master of the Manor, were to marry some wealthy, high-born girl, who would be an honor and a credit to him and to them all. Her Uncle Eric’s sentiments exactly. Once indeed, during those days, she actually spoke to Hugh, warning him not to be so attentive to Gertrude, but he looked at her with such a bewildered expression that she changed the subject immediately.

Gertrude danced about the house as if she were possessed of wings when Hugh announced his intention of going with her and paying a flying visit to Lindsay Manor and Uncle Eric. It wouldn’t seem like parting with them all at once, she said. But when the fatal Thursday afternoon drew near she suddenly lost all her good spirits. Agatha, missing her, stole softly up to her room. The girl was lying on the bed, her face buried in the pillow.

“You’re not crying?” said Agatha.

“No, I’m not crying, I’m just fighting, that’s all,” said Ger-

trude, turning up her flushed cheeks. "I do want to go—I am just *longing* to get home. I won't let myself think I ain't, ever. I am glad to go, glad to go, glad to go!" She muttered the words over and over, as if trying to teach her heart to submit to the lesson her lips had learned.

"Hugh is going with you—you will not be alone," said Agatha.

"Yes; I am glad of *that* much, anyway," returned Gertrude, with fervor.

Agatha walked about the room, straightening things here and there in her own precise way. There was a little curve to her upper lip her mother would have recognized at once. It meant that Agatha felt she had a duty to perform—disagreeable, perhaps, but still very necessary.

"Are there any girls at Lindsay whom Uncle Eric likes—I mean any rich girls?" she asked, slowly.

"Rich girls? That Uncle Eric *likes*? Why, what a funny question!" Gertrude rose on one elbow, and stared at Agatha in surprise.

"No, it isn't, when I explain it. Do you know, I imagine Uncle Eric wants Hugh to marry some rich Southern girl. I wouldn't be a bit surprised to hear that he had already picked her out."

"Uncle Eric? I never dreamt of such a thing, and I don't believe Uncle Eric does, either!" cried Gertrude.

"Perhaps not," said Agatha, with a mysterious smile. "I only thought you might know of some one—What pretty roses! Where did you get them?"

"Hugh got them for me," said Gertrude. She had grown very white all of a sudden, and she let her head droop down on the pillow again. "I'm going to try to sleep for a half hour, Agatha. I don't want to have a headache on the train to-night."

Seemingly very much astonished at the curt tone, Agatha left the room. Gertrude did not try to compose herself to sleep. She lay staring at the ceiling. Pretty soon she sat up on the edge of the bed, looking blankly at the vase of roses on the table between the windows. Then rising, she walked over to them and felt the

petals softly, hardly conscious of what she was doing, staring down at them.

What a queer thing to say to her! What an absurd thing! Uncle Eric wouldn't—

The blood about her heart seemed turning to ice. Hugh married—her Cousin Hugh—her champion, her adviser! Bringing some one here who would have juster privilege to call Mrs. Lindsay mother—greater right to a daughter's place in her heart and home! Her hands clenched tightly. Why did she care? What was her Cousin Hugh to her?

And now the blackness of desolation submerged her. She shuddered. Cousin? He wasn't her cousin, he was nothing to her, a stranger. She was an outcast, a pauper, a beggar-maid, subsisting on his uncle's bounty, living on the money that was by right another's. And Uncle Eric wanted him to marry a wealthy girl—Uncle Eric had her picked out—Agatha had said as much—

She drew her breath through her teeth with a sharp, hissing sound. Why had Agatha said that to her? Did she—

The blood flamed hot and high into the girl's cheeks. She turned quickly to pace the room with hasty steps, almost running in her excitement. Did Agatha suppose she was in love with Hugh? With Hugh?

In love with Hugh? She put her hands to her forehead and stood still at that thought. In love with Hugh? Why was everything so changed? Why did her heart hurt her so?

"She is not like other girls," had said Mrs. Lindsay. "Hers is a strange nature. There will come a crisis in her life some day, and over the threshold of her girlhood she will step a woman."

The crisis, the trial of her life had come. The girl went to the door and closed it softly, fearful of being seen or heard. Then she threw herself on the bed once more. Not to cry—she felt now as if she would never cry again—not to burst into the passionate weeping as soon forgotten as the cause of grief. The wound was too deep to be soothed by tears. Only to lie there, in white-faced, silent, dry-eyed anguish, fighting the hardest battle of her life alone.

CHAPTER IX.

“INDOLENCE.”

IT was a changed little girl whom Hugh Lindsay escorted to the Manor Saturday morning. She was so quiet and so reserved that he thought it due to her parting from his people—only he felt that one mood, with her, had never lasted quite so long before. Uncle Eric's reception of both was heartfelt. Aunt Estelle had a smile of welcome, and even Mildred stooped to kiss the little, girlish face. Mildred, to Hugh's eyes, looked just as beautiful and as serenely unfeeling as she had been four months previous. But when she spoke her manner was almost cordial and her eyes rested on him in friendly fashion. For she was grateful. She appreciated his efforts to carry out her wishes, and his letter to her, when he sent her the one from Banks & Belding, had been so earnestly expressive of his good will and sympathy that she cherished it yet with a warmth of heart of which one, looking at her, could scarcely believe her capable.

And now Gertrude became a sudden source of perplexity, and Hugh knew that Uncle Eric's eyes sought her quiet face with an almost anxious look, for she was indeed pale and downcast. That evening, after dinner, he spoke to the young man about her.

“Did she really feel so badly over having to come back?” he asked, in a hurt tone. “What is the matter with the child?”

“I don't know, Uncle Eric—unless that is really the case,” said Hugh, frankly. “She had France and Phil, you know, to make things lively—and she is such a baby—”

“Why can't she have France and Phil down here?” quickly. “You didn't give me Phil last year—let your mother send the

two on now for a few weeks so as to get her accustomed to the change."

"Phil goes back to school Monday," remarked Hugh, cautiously. "But perhaps mother would allow France to come for a while."

"If she does, I'll send Matthew straight through to Charlenton to meet her," said Uncle Eric. "She won't get lost. I'd like those children to see Lindsay."

But when he told Gertrude what he had done she put her arms about him and hid her face on his shoulder.

"I am sorry, Uncle Eric," she whispered. "I did want to be alone with you—indeed I did. I am angry at myself that I stayed away from you so long. But never mind. France is lovely—you will surely like her."

Hugh left the Manor in a thoroughly uncomfortable and disappointed state of mind. The change in Gertrude was almost too noticeable. She was just as sweet as ever, but there was a strange thoughtfulness about her, and—she avoided him. That was the worst of all. She had been his pet, his special property, and this new phase of hers annoyed him very much.

"Tell mother that her daughter loves her and will love her always. And ask her to pray for me, Hugh." She looked up at him, and her fingers clung almost beseechingly to his hand. "Tell her that the black thoughts have come, but that I am doing my very best. Tenderness and patience, she told me. I am fighting hard."

So she spoke to him when they parted, and he gazed at her with tender eyes. Words trembled on his lips. Great pity filled him. He found, somewhat to his surprise, that he wanted to take her in his arms and kiss that small white face, and then to take it back with him, away from this life into the sunshine of his own home.

That was as far as his thoughts went. He felt as if it were France or Agatha whom he was leaving here, surrounded by coldness where she should have had naught but affection. She was with him during the long drive to Kentboro. His mind was full

of her as he entered the station and got out his ticket for Charleston. He seemed to see her face, to hear her last words.

Excited voices near him roused him from his preoccupation. He looked up in a casual way, his eyes resting on three women standing close to the door of the station-room—two of them angry and disputing. He glanced at the third, who, somewhat apart from the others, stood quiet and silent, a half-smile on her curved lips. And at sight of her the thought of Gertrude, the memory of her face, her voice, left him.

"My dear," said the older woman, turning to the silent girl, "we have lost our tickets."

"Well?" asked she, indifferently. "We will have to buy new ones."

Glancing about him as he heard these words, Hugh saw a crumpled envelope lying almost at his feet. He picked it up somewhat gingerly. He could see the tickets inside.

"Buy new ones! It is easy for you to talk that way, Leigh. You are very unconcerned, aren't you? Not alone tickets to Charleston, but through to New York and return. What your father will say to me—"

The girl lifted her eyebrows somewhat imperiously.

"In public? Mother, this is too bad!" She spoke almost warningly, for at that moment Hugh approached and raised his hat.

"May I ask if these are the tickets you have lost? They were lying on the floor—"

"Oh, thank you, thank you, a thousand times!" said the older lady. "Take these, Marie, you chatterbox, and be more careful with them now that you have them again. I am very much indebted to you, sir."

The younger lady bowed graciously, and her lips parted in a slow, languorous smile that somehow set Hugh's pulses throbbing. He turned quickly, and they disappeared. When the train rolled into the station, he walked through the cars trying to find an empty seat. When he reached the last car he stood looking about him. A low voice fell on his ears.

"There is a seat to spare here, sir, if you would care to take it."

He hesitated, as the maid gathered the bundles from beside the girl Leigh, but the temptation could not be resisted. He helped to put the bags and bundles into the rack, and found place for his own dressing-case there also. Then he settled himself in quietness, prepared for the three-hour ride to Charleston. Every once in a while, his eyes turned, as if by accident, toward the window, where the profile of the girl showed so clearly. It was a privilege to feast his artist soul on her beauty, he thought, it was so remarkable. The train rolled out of the station and there was a long silence. By and by the older lady leaned over, and whispered something in her daughter's ear. The girl opened her eyes indifferently—then turned them on Hugh. He saw that they were almost purple, fringed with heavy, curling lashes. She shook her head.

"You can if you wish, mother," she said. "Curiosity will be the death of you, I am afraid."

The older lady promptly turned toward Hugh.

"Am I mistaken in thinking you a Lindsay?" she asked, addressing the young man.

He gave a start of surprise.

"No; you are not," he said. "My name is Hugh Lindsay."

"There, Leigh—I knew it! What did I tell you? You have the characteristic Lindsay face, sir."

"I have so been told," answered Hugh, courteously.

"I am Colonel Fenton's wife," she went on. "Colonel Fenton of Kentboro. We and the Lindsays are great friends—this is my daughter, Leigh. You are the next nephew, Hugh? Mr. Lindsay was speaking to us of you."

"I have heard Mrs. Lindsay mention your name also," said Hugh. "I am delighted to know you, Mrs. Fenton."

She made smiling answer, and soon they were engaged in earnest conversation. Leigh Fenton did not speak to him at all, but he was too glad to feel that her eyes rested on him once or twice in a not unapproving fashion. Both ladies were dressed with that perfection of simplicity which tells so much to an ob-

serving world. The girl's slim figure was full of indefinable grace; the perfect outline of her lovely face, from the low white brow to the round chin, was exquisite. Everything about her bespoke the aristocrat. Looking at her Hugh was glad, for the first time in his life, that he was a Lindsay. Somehow it seemed to bring him nearer to her.

"We are going to New York," volunteered Mrs. Fenton, at last. "We got back from Italy only two months ago. But Leigh is anxious to hear Vertucchi, and we intend staying for the Horse Show."

"Perhaps I can be of some service to you," said Hugh. "I am in New York most of the year, although my home is in Connecticut. I have just been on a flying visit to Uncle Eric—my little cousin has been with us for a while."

"Gertrude?" It was Leigh who spoke now. "Is that the one?"

"Yes—Gertrude Waring. Of course you know her?"

"Fairly well." She shrugged her shoulders. "I do not see much of the young ladies of Lindsay Manor."

"No?" in a wondering tone, that implied very plainly what he thought. She smiled and relapsed into silence.

"Have you heard Vertucchi?" asked Mrs. Fenton.

"The violinist? No, madam, I have not. But it is because I have been quite busy. I am very fond of music, and the violin is my favorite instrument."

"Really?" said the girl. A shade of animation crept into her features. "It is mine also."

"I think the capability for understanding music must be developed, as well as the genius for interpreting it," said Hugh. "I never let the opportunity pass of hearing our best players."

"Nor I," said Leigh. She sat up and her eyes kindled. Hugh almost lost his head, she was so wondrously beautiful. "I have within me, I am positive, an undeveloped, artistic soul. I could not live without music. And when one plays the violin as it should be played—oh, it is heaven, then."

Hugh looked at her gravely. How sweet and full her tones

were—like the ringing of a deep bell. He began to talk, hardly knowing what he said in his eagerness to keep her interested.

"Perhaps I do not confine my admiration exclusively to violin-playing," he said. "A beautiful voice, for instance—do you not think more expression may be given the vocal organs than can be put into a violin or piano, no matter how complete the mastery one gains over it?"

Leigh drew a deep, long breath.

"I don't know—the violin is the only instrument that can carry me out of myself. A man must have a noble, high-spirited soul to put music into a fiddle."

"A man may have a soul to speak two different languages," said Hugh. "The one, breathed into his fiddle, may be all fire and nobility—the other quite the reverse."

"Quite the reverse? A man who, by his magic power, can raise thousands from this dull earth to heaven itself? Who can make his hearers forget their pains, their miseries, their troubles? Oh, if I could but play like—like some I have heard! Applause is the food of the gods—the nectar that we read about must have been the praise of the multitude!"

He had succeeded in arousing her, then. He forgot to be surprised; she was so wonderful in her beauty that he would have liked to have agreed with her and let it rest at that. He saw Mrs. Fenton look at the girl a little anxiously and purse her lips together. He shook his head.

"It is a fine thing to raise people from the slough of despond," he said. "If you do it for love—love of your art, love of mankind. But what reliance can be placed on the favor of the many? To-day you speak to them in the language of heaven, and they praise you. To-morrow a dancer comes, and they praise her. The next day a circus performer, who holds on to a tight rope with her teeth. And they praise her. And they'll talk about her long after they have forgotten you."

Leigh looked at him in astonishment, for he spoke a little warmly. Then her mother came in with a light remark. She was one of those persons who could make a friend of every polite,

well-dressed stranger she met. Leigh was a salutary restraint—but even she could not control the good woman's love of gossip. She allowed Mrs. Fenton to chatter on now, only putting in a word here and there, when the conversation became too personal for her liking. This word was sufficient to check the voluble lady.

Nothing seemed quite clear to Hugh by this time. Some strange vapor seemed stealing over his brain. He wished that Mrs. Fenton would go to sleep—anything, anything so that he could look at Leigh. And just then, to his infinite surprise and disgust and dismay, the guard called out:

“Charleston!”

* * * * *

Mrs. Fenton did not say a single word to her daughter about Hugh until they reached their rooms in the hotel. Then, as the girl stood combing out her hair before the long mirror, the mother came in and shut the door behind her.

“It is good to get into a loose garment,” she said. “Do you want Marie to brush your hair? I'll call her.”

“I prefer to do it myself,” answered Leigh, indifferently.

“Quite a fortunate occurrence—our meeting, wasn't it, Leigh?” she went on, seeing that the girl did not offer to keep up the conversation.

“Quite,” said Leigh, with a shade of sarcasm in her voice.

“What do you think of him?”

“Awfully unsophisticated. Very amusing.”

“Is that all?”

“That's all.” She laughed unpleasantly. “That's sufficient, if Gertrude Waring has told him anything about the other Lindsay.”

“You know, Leigh, I warned you—”

“I am aware that you did. But the name Lindsay makes me feel positively ill. I wish you'd go to bed. Yes; I know what you're after. Write home to father to-morrow—tell him I think his choice is a clean-looking fellow and an aristocrat, though he evidently doesn't know it.”

"I'm glad you like him. Good night, Leigh."

"Good night, mother."

* * * * *

France did not go to Lindsay, nor had Gertrude paid another visit to her friends, though it was September again—the last of it. For twelve months now life had passed uneventfully for Hugh Lindsay. After that never-to-be-forgotten evening, Leigh Fenton had gone out of his existence. He did not see her when he left Charleston, for he took train to New York before either of the ladies thought of waking. Nor did he go, ever, to hear Vertucchi. The senior partner died just then, and when affairs were wound up the junior member offered his confidential man an interest in the concern. Hugh plunged into business almost feverishly—he had no time to waste. But he had moments of abstraction, hours of dreaming, of reverie, from which he would rouse himself to greater absorption in work. He entered for the next Academy exhibition, however. And this time his study was not from still life. He called it "Indolence," and it was the portrait of a gloriously beautiful woman with lips of scarlet and violet eyes. A languorous smile just touched both eyes and lips—a dreamy, sensuous smile. It was the most talked of picture of the exhibition.

Hugh was not unhappy. If Love had found him and gone again he was content to think of it as a beautiful dream—something to brighten his life, to glorify it. There was one less in the family circle. Agatha had married and was now in her own home, and John Perry made her a good husband. Hugh wondered at the calmness and evenness of their married life. Had he not seen Leigh Fenton such a thought would never have entered his mind. But new ideas were stirring within him. In spite of himself his thoughts strayed often to the beautiful girl of whom that one fleeting glimpse had been vouchsafed him. He wondered if he would ever see her again. Further than that brief speculation he never ventured.

He heard often from Lindsay Manor. Uncle Eric notified him of the death of the mother of Laurence and Harold in Kentboro. He heard, too, from Aunt Estelle and once from Mildred. The

latter wrote him a pretty little note, couched in most conventional phrase. Reading between the lines he imagined that she regretted very much her betrayal of her real feelings. He did not cast about for means or ways of reassuring her now, for the grave young philanthropist had changed much during the past year—he was becoming more wrapped in self. One thing did annoy him. Gertrude no longer wrote to him, and at first he missed the sprightly little letters. But between his mother and herself and France there was kept up a continual correspondence.

And now that the year was over, and things seemed going smoothly once more, Hugh felt that a rest was imperative. He really looked pale and careworn the evening he reached home; his step had lost its sprightliness, and his mother, with anxious worry, saw that there were heavy lines about her boy's bright blue eyes.

His picture had again taken first prize, and a splendid offer was made for it. But he refused to sell, and carried it home with him to Westport. And there his mother found it one day. In the brief glimpses she had had of her darling this last few months she had often wondered if it were her own imagination, or if there was really a change in him. Was it possible Hugh was not well? Or in love? Mother-like, she laughed over the last self-question as absurd. Her Hugh in love!

"Take a look at my Academy picture when you go upstairs, mother," he said to her. Perhaps his carelessness was a little overdone—at any rate, she felt there was more to it than he would have her think. "I hung it last night."

"I thought I heard strange noises rather late," she answered, smiling. "You must like the picture very much to set it up so soon."

And she went immediately to look at it. She stood in front of it, questioning it with her wise mother eyes. Then she took a chair and sat down before it. It was in this position that Hugh discovered her.

"Do you like it?" he asked, indifferently.

"Like is a poor word to use. Hugh, come here."

He came obediently, struck by the new note in her voice. "I want you to look at it with me, son. Is this—*she*?"

He started as if struck. She had not taken her eyes off the picture, but that quick start told her all she wanted to know, and a sudden chill crept over her. Then he turned toward her with his usual frankness and his eyes met hers fearlessly.

"This is she, mother."

The mother sighed and her head drooped.

"Why, mother?" he asked then. "How did you know?"

"Oh, I knew—I felt it the minute I looked at it."

"And—what do you think of her, dear?" His voice shook a trifle over the question.

"I had hoped to see you happy," she answered, with a sigh. "This girl will not make you so."

"Mother—"

"My boy, my boy, listen to me. Oh, doesn't a mother *know*, child. She is so beautiful, dear—almost too beautiful for earth. I have never seen such a face. She was not raised in our Northern climate with that imperious loveliness."

"No; she is Southern. And, mother—I only met her just once—we met by merest accident, although her people and the Lindsays are neighbors. She may be married now, for all I know, or engaged, or something. She is simply my ideal, mother."

"Your ideal, boy? Can you read what lies hid behind those purple eyes, or lurks behind those scarlet lips? There, I know you can not help loving her—she is royal, child. Only I pray God another has found her and wived her before you meet again."

"Ah, mother—"

"Foolish words from a foolish woman, maybe, but I read anguish for you there—anguish and pain and bitterness of heart. Oh, Hugh, my boy, only remember, when wading in the dark waters of disappointment, that your mother loves you."

* * * * *

When he met her that afternoon he had taken down his picture and hidden it at the bottom of his trunk. His mother's face was bright and smiling, and she was altogether her own self again.

"A letter from Uncle Eric," she said. "I thought you were asleep when Phil brought it, so kept it waiting for you."

He frowned angrily, and tore at the envelope in an irritated fashion.

"Uncle Eric seems to haunt me," he said. "Every time I come home, a letter from him turns up. I want peace and quiet and I am going to have it, and I don't care what he says, I shall not go to Lindsay—"

He glanced carelessly through the written sheet. His mother, watching him, saw his face change as the vehement words died away on his lips.

"Uncle Eric is giving a reception on the 27th and wants me to be present," he said. His voice had such a strange, new note in it that his mother wondered. "Funny thing about Uncle Eric. I'll bet if I had taken that five thousand dollars he'd never have bothered with me again. Now I'm to be introduced to his guests as the future master of Lindsay. I suppose I shall have to attend that, mother?"

"It would seem churlish to refuse," said the mother, gently. "In fact, I was going to suggest that you go to see him some time this fall. Uncle Eric is an old man, dear—it is best to humor him."

He did not contradict her. After a while he went into the parlor, and sitting down to the piano, started to pick out a song with his finger. It was "Father O'Flynn." Mrs. Lindsay stopped reading and listened to him. He began to whistle it. A big tear splashed down on her book. Let him play it—but would that happy time ever come back to her again? That carefree, honest time when they had been but one soul and one mind? And one heart, too, she thought, with a heavy sigh.

For the rest of that day Hugh was in the most jovial of spirits, and the mother forgot her prescience of coming sorrow. She wondered that she had thought him queer or distract, for now he was her own jolly, good-hearted lad again, and did much to bring back the old-time, homelike air to the house.

"It's just like it used to be when Gertrude was here, and before

Agatha got married," said France. "It's good to have Hugh with us, mother."

And Hugh, ere he went to bed, read for the hundredth time the little postscript appended to Uncle Eric's letter:

"It gives me pleasure to write you that the Fentons are home and are coming also. Miss Leigh, it seems, is indebted to you for a courtesy rendered her the last time you were here. She would like to thank you again, she says."

So she remembered him! Hugh's heart bounded high, and had been leaping exultantly all day. He was in the seventh heaven of delight. Only for that postscript Uncle Eric's reception to the heir would have been like Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. Hugh would not have attended.

CHAPTER X.

GERTRUDE IN A NEW ROLE.

SHE was standing under the chandelier when Hugh first saw her. He had reached Lindsay rather late, as usual, and almost all the guests had arrived before he came down. He looked uncommonly well in his dress-suit, and felt the conscious superiority fine clothes give a man. Gertrude saw him first and came toward him—not in the old, impulsive fashion, but with a sweet, new, womanly dignity, that sat well on her despite her youth. Hugh held her hand in his, looking gravely into the little face that flushed under his earnest, searching, penetrating glance.

“I can hardly believe that this is my little Gertrude,” he began, adopting the gentle tone he had always used to her—as if he were addressing a child. She smiled, and drew her hand away, and he realized that his words were more true than he had intended them to be, for indeed she was not the same. Something had changed her very much, and he stared after her, wondering. Raising his eyes then he saw Leigh Fenton.

Many men were around her, old and young, standing beside her, listening to her, paying her attention. Hugh tried to judge her as if he were looking at a stranger, in spite of the sudden warmth he felt stealing through his veins. She was of medium height, almost thin, but there was something seductive about her. Her gown was white—not a touch of color to relieve it, until one looked at the glowing eyes and the flaming lips and knew she needed none. Her golden hair was twisted in a careless knot from her fair, low brow. She looked every inch of what she was—a queen among women. She looked a tall, white lily, and her hair was its yellow heart.

A reverent shyness took possession of the man standing watching her with his soul in his earnest gaze. What other woman in God's world had ever been like this—so sweet, so perfect, so noble—

Mrs. Fenton herself interrupted his reflections. She came up to him, resplendent in silk and diamonds, Uncle Eric escorting her across the great, waxed floor.

"This is Mr. Lindsay—I recognized you immediately," she said smiling, and holding out her hand. He bent over it with gallant courtesy. She liked ceremony, and he was ceremonious enough to suit even her. The next moment, it seemed to him, he was standing before his goddess.

She, too, held out her slim, delicate fingers, giving him at the same time such a dazzling smile, such an almost tender smile, that his heart leaped. But he did not have time to say more than the few words conventionality demanded, before Uncle Eric took him away to introduce him to the other guests. Everything seemed indistinct to him after that. He seemed to be moving in a dream. Conscious of nothing but that she was here—and that she had smiled on him. He earned a reputation for staidness and stupidity that night that he did not deserve, for his one aim was to get back to her side quickly; and to do this he was as brief and perfunctory as possible in his intercourse with the others. As soon as he could do so with propriety he went to her. And now he found another joy awaiting him—he was to take her in to dinner. At table the partner on her left was a deaf old man, who persisted in engaging her in conversation, so that Hugh's bliss was not altogether unalloyed. He could notice, however, with what charming patience she listened to him, and strove to make herself understood. By and by he became interested in the good things that were being served him, for the *Manor chef* was famous. Leigh, with a sigh of relief, turned to Hugh, met his sympathetic glance, and then both laughed, with quiet understanding of what was passing in each other's mind.

"It is so long since we met," she said, keeping her lovely eyes upon him. "I am surprised that you remembered me."

"Are you?" he asked, quite coolly. "I don't think you believe that assertion."

She looked a little astonished, for really this sounded positively rude. She bent over her plate then and vouchsafed him no further speech. Hugh wished he had not been so blunt.

"I did not hear Vertucchi," he ventured after a while.

"No?" indifferently. "I did. I have heard better."

"Is that so? Well, then, I did not miss so much after all." Her eyes kindled.

"I said I had heard better—*you* probably have not."

"I think we are quarreling," said Hugh.

"I *know* we are," she answered, and then they laughed again, and after that there was cordiality between them.

"You must not care much for the Manor when you can stay away from it a whole year—you see, I have been listening to your uncle," she said, smiling. "He often tells father that he can not understand your indifference to this fine old place."

"But I love every inch of it," he said warmly. "It has been the home of my people for many generations."

"I know—I suppose that does prepossess you in its favor."

"You speak as if you could not understand my liking. Don't *you* think the Manor wonderful?"

"No," she answered, frankly. "The life here is too circumscribed, too narrow. I should die in a month."

"You need not lead a narrow life in it unless you cared to do so," said Hugh, pleasantly. "Different natures make different surroundings."

"True. Have you traveled much?"

"Not at all. I have my traveling still to do—even my wander-year. Some day, I hope—"

"The world is my field," with a smile. "Perhaps that is why I do not care much for Lindsay, or for Kentboro. I am seldom home more than a few months at a time—I can not stand sameness. I have been through France, Spain, and Italy. I have been in Rome, the wonderful city. I think Rome is my Mecca—I intend going again next year."

"You love Rome?" His eyes kindled. "It is one of the shrines I look forward to visiting. Rome, the incomparable, the glorious. It has had its effect on you, I see."

"Everything is so solemn and so old," she said. "I love mysticism and all things ancient."

"You, the incarnation of youth!" he said. He brought his wineglass to his lips. "To you," he murmured, smiling. She smiled also.

"And you have seen the churches and the Catacombs? And the Holy Father? You surely had one audience with him since you have been so often?"

"I am not religious," she made answer. "I did not care to see him at all, though people do go so absurdly wild over him. It isn't the religious Rome I care about—rather the ruins of the heathen city. I'd like to have lived in Rome before Christianity spoiled its ceremonies and rites and—"

"We are not in sympathy now," he said, abruptly. "Let us change the conversation. Did you know I was a Catholic?"

"Are you? Really? How funny! I thought Mr. Lindsay was a stanch Protestant like myself."

"He is—I am of the Catholic side of the family."

"And you are in earnest? I can scarcely believe it. *You* a Catholic! And you thought I was one, probably, too?"

"You seemed so perfect in my eyes I could scarcely think you anything else," he returned, without hesitation.

"You are very brave to say such a thing to me," she answered, the slow smile he remembered so well parting her lips. "Very brave. But you must remember that one is what one has been taught to be, and let it rest at that. Do not let us become serious—for serious I will not be. I like to take life as it comes—pleasantly, easily, gently. There is so much misery in the world," she said, looking at him with her glorious eyes, and they were the eyes now of a beautiful child. "I could not alleviate it all—therefore I will have none of it. For my heart would ache so over the good I could not accomplish! Pouf! what would be the result? I would grow ancient and faded and weary. A few old people

would look after me, praising me. But women would pity the forlorn old maid and men flee at my approach."

Her naïveté was charming. Hugh would not give himself time to think of her sentiments. She was so beautiful and so very sweet, and when her lips smiled so joyously how could he help agreeing with her? And after that, all was easy sailing to poor Hugh. All during dinner—and afterward. When the gentlemen rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room he made his way to her eagerly and she gave him first place. He was becoming almost blindly wrapped up in her. She was so very lovely, with now a touch of the hauteur which, carried to excess, made Mildred repellent, and again a glimpse of the childishness that had made him almost love Gertrude.

She was among the first to leave, and after she was gone Hugh looked about him, wondering, as lovers have ever done, and as lovers ever will do, what made that seemingly brilliant room so empty and so dull. He thought then of Gertrude—he had not seen her in such a while, and after that glimpse of her when he first entered had totally forgotten her existence. He bit his lip in annoyance at himself and looked for her. She was standing in the deep recess of one of the windows alone. As he came toward her, smiling into her face, he noticed how pale she was and how tired. He wondered what new trouble was pressing on her to bring that weary droop to the little mouth.

"What is it, cousin?" he asked, tenderly. "Are you worried, dear? Uncle Eric—Aunt Estelle—"

She shook her head.

"No; nothing like that any more. Aunt Estelle is very kind to me. And Uncle Eric! Well, I can not say how much we are to each other now."

"I am glad to hear that. You look so tired, child."

"I am tired. What an endless evening it has been!"

"Endless? Endless? Why, it seems to me it has only just begun."

"Instead of being nearly finished! But then you had such a pleasant companion, Cousin Hugh." She spoke apathetically.

"Do you know Miss Fenton?" he asked, eagerly. "Do you meet her often?"

She turned away from that glowing, expectant face, for she could not look at it unmoved.

"I do not meet her often. Leigh Fenton and I have little in common. Besides that she is much older than I am and she regards me as a child."

"Poor little Gertrude!" laughing and trying to rally her out of her despondency. But she did not smile.

"Do you like her, Hugh?" Her voice sounded muffled.

"Very much, little cousin," he answered. "She is the most beautiful girl I have ever seen—and the most interesting."

"She is just like Mildred Powell—and you never thought Mildred very beautiful," a little pettishly.

"Like Mildred Powell!" He stared at her in amazement. "Great heavens, what a comparison!"

"Well, look at them some time. You'll find that their eyes are exactly the same color—they have lips shaped exactly the same. Their hair is blonde—they wear it exactly alike. Everything, except their stature—"

"But, Gertrude, any one with eyes in his head can surely see the difference. There is no more comparison than—well, I fail to find a simile. I'm really astonished at such an absurdity! One is all animation, spirit, the other is cold, inanimate—"

"That's it exactly," said the girl, still in that indifferent tone. "Mildred Powell is saving her smiles and witcheries for one man; her husband will find her heart-whole. Leigh Fenton wastes hers on every man she meets. She is quite an accomplished actress."

"Oh, Gertrude!" He spoke in such a hurt, shocked tone that she winced a little.

"That sounds like a woman's jealousy of a more fortunate sister, doesn't it?" she asked, with a coldness that reminded him of Mildred. "Well, let it go at that—it doesn't really matter what opinion you have. Will you tell me of your mother and of—of Agatha?"

She stumbled a little over the last word—it hurt her to pro-

nounce it. Agatha had been right, for she herself had seen that postscript to Uncle Eric's letter, and after seeing it the old man told her of his wishes for Hugh, the heir of Lindsay. The Fentons were a splendid family—not as old as the Lindsays, but very honorable. The young woman would bring wealth and beauty, and money weds best with money, said Uncle Eric, dictatorially.

Hugh looked at Gertrude Waring and the expression of his face was a strange one.

"Are you sure you care to hear of my mother?" he asked. "I do not recognize in you the girl my mother parted with, and whom she loves so dearly."

Tears welled slowly up to her eyes—tears he did not observe.

"Don't speak so harshly to me when I have not seen you for a whole year," she said, in a piteous little voice that softened him. "I told you I was tired—I *am* tired. But tired most of all of myself. Now give me news of your mother, Hugh."

He smiled in the old boyish way—he was satisfied.

"She is well, very well, dear, and sends her love to her little girl. I have a box of remembrances upstairs for you from France and Phil—and Agatha also. Agatha is quite a housewife now."

"I suppose so." She stood silent for a long time; at last she roused herself with a sigh.

"I must wake up—poor Mildred will feel strange at being left to bear the burden of entertainment so long alone. I must ask you to excuse me, Hugh." She put her hands to her hair, patting it with those indescribable, dainty touches that belong to girlhood. Then she looked about the room, at the guests. Mildred was at the piano playing. A tall young man, dark and handsome, stood lounging carelessly, it seemed, against the fireplace—but his eyes had been on her from the moment Hugh approached her until now. Gertrude turned toward him, and her smile invited him. He was at her side almost instantly, bending over her with the look that comes to a man's face only when he sees before him the one girl.

"Cousin Hugh, you surely know Mr. Cameron? This is Bayard Cameron—one of our neighbors. You met the day poor

Harold was buried—but perhaps neither of you remember. You do? That is nice."

Hugh felt a strong inclination to rub his eyes. He stared at Gertrude blankly, for the tired look had disappeared as if by magic, and the soft eyes she raised to Bayard Cameron's face were bright and shining.

"I want you to take me to Mildred," she said, in a winning manner. "My cousin is too dreamy a companion for me to-night. Good-by, Hugh, I'll see you again—pardon us. Now, Mr. Cameron, I must ask you if you really—"

She flirted her fan in her gloved hand, moved away, and Hugh heard no more. Looking stupidly after them, he realized that Gertrude Waring was a child no longer. Something like anger stirred within him as he saw Bayard Cameron's smiling countenance so close to her bronze-brown hair, his dark eyes fastened on her charming, blushing, dimpled face.

"Well!" he said, and that was all, for speech was impossible.

He looked at the opposite wall, then pinched himself; then turned his eyes to where she had stood beside him. Perhaps he—No; he wasn't dreaming. There was one of the white roses on the floor that had fallen from her belt. He took it up gingerly in his fingers, looked at it, threw it down again. Then gazed once more after the little child he had known a year ago.

She had developed. The girl he had petted and advised and comforted had the scepter of power in her hand now, and waved it royally. Bayard Cameron was not alone in his attendance. There were two others beside her, good-looking Southerners, both of them. Hugh had met them. He watched Gertrude. Watched her dimples come and go, her white teeth flash and disappear.

Yes; Gertrude was awake with a vengeance, he thought, swinging around into the window recess. Then, as he turned from the lights and the music and the gay company, Leigh's face came up before him. From under queenly brows those tender violet eyes met his, and in those eyes he read a gentle woman's soul. How beautiful she was, how serene, how calm, how tender and how sweet! What a way she had of poising her beautiful body, of

swaying as she walked! How cultured and how well-bred her tones, how refined her every movement. Leigh! Leigh Fenton, Leigh Fenton! It was the sweetest name in God's bright world.

* * * * *

“How striking Hugh Lindsay was in his attentions this evening, my dear,” said Mrs. Fenton to her daughter on the way home. “He scarcely left your side.”

Leigh smiled. “He is very original,” she said, languidly. “He positively tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He is like a cold water shower. Shocking, but refreshing.”

“I like him very much,” said the mother, cautiously. “I would take him to be a young man any girl might fancy.”

“Yes?”

The answer was exasperating. Mrs. Fenton tried to see the girl’s face in the dusk of the carriage, but could not.

“After a while *you* might, too, Leigh. He is young, well-born, whole-souled, rich. Is there any more one could ask?”

“No more. There is no telling what folly I am capable of. I may even permit myself to care for him.”

“You can if you try.”

The girl laughed.

“Sometimes, dear mother, love comes like a ray of light—a flash of lightning in a summer sky. At other times it steals softly, gently, quietly into the heart. Perhaps the latter will be the case with me.”

Mrs. Fenton actually snorted. When the girl adopted this mocking tone it always enraged her.

“Don’t pose before your mother, Leigh—I am not Hugh Lindsay. Your father selected your sister’s husband—she is a happy, contented woman. Be wise. All this foolishness will wear away, once the seriousness of married life overtakes you.”

“Why do you wish me to have *him*? From whom does he derive his future wealth? From that vulgar, impossible aunt of his! Only for his prospects he’s as poor as a church mouse. Besides, Gertrude Waring is in love with him.”

"Gertrude Waring? When every one knows Bayard Cameron is just mad about her? Leigh Fenton, are you crazy?"

"I have seen too many girls in love to be mistaken, and I was watching her to-night. She's a hateful little thing, anyhow, and she dislikes me from the bottom of her heart. I can stand that if I take the man she loves away from her. It will be a good joke." She laughed and her mother's lips curved in a smile of satisfaction—a smile that the next words dispelled. "But why should I marry Hugh Lindsay? I care absolutely nothing for him, and he is all the world to her. Perhaps I shall be magnanimous for once in my life."

"Quixotic notions sit ill on you," said the mother sharply. "Your father has set his heart on the marriage."

"Oh, has he? He has often set his heart on other men—you, too. The trouble is I can't get *my* heart set on them. When I *did* care, the two of you combined to make me very miserable. You succeeded. I told you then I should lead you a merry dance and I mean to keep my word. No; I'll do exactly as I please. Perhaps I'll marry Hugh Lindsay—if I do not take the notion to go to Paris to-morrow. Perhaps, even if I stay, I won't marry him."

"But your father—"

It was Mrs. Fenton's misfortune to be a nag, and this nagging had helped to spoil the girl's untrained, naturally selfish disposition.

"It is very well for you to turn up your nose at young men the way you do," she stormed now. "You can quote poetry and be fantastic, but you love money just the same, and all the things that money gives you. It is well for you you have a father who will get you everything you want, and a mother who slaves herself to death going here and there to play propriety," etc., etc., etc.

It lasted during the long ride home. Leigh, settling herself comfortably among the cushions, heard never a word of it. She looked steadily out of the window, her thoughts far away. By and by the lids drooped over the violet eyes, and in a few minutes her deep, regular breathing showed that she had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER XI.

"THE ONLY THING IN THE WORLD."

AND now Uncle Eric came forward, playing an important part in the little world that surrounded him. He threw open Lindsay Manor and showed it forth in all its beauty and sumptuousness. It was a royal dwelling indeed, and he made the most of it for his nephew's good. The marriage of the heir of Lindsay to Colonel Fenton's daughter had become the predominant wish of the old man's heart, and, as usual with him when he conceived an idea, he was doing all in his power to further it. Hugh's evident fascination for the girl pleased him more than words could say. He even went so far as to drive to Kentboro for a private interview with Colonel Fenton, and during that interview he told him, in almost direct speech, what his intentions were in regard to his nephew—so that parental influence might be thrown into the balance. The result was that Colonel Fenton and his wife also saw a great future before their imperious, self-willed Leigh at last.

Meanwhile the young lady herself was calm and non-committal as ever—so much of an iceberg as to cause them not a little trepidation and many moments of despair. No hints, no innuendoes, not even direct asking, could win from her a single admission of what she meant to do or of what her intentions were.

Aunt Estelle was not quite so pleased with the prospect. She admitted to herself, for she was, with all her faults, honest and unprejudiced, that she did not make the perfect mistress of such a house as the fair, aristocratic ladies whose faces hung in line with hers in the great gallery upstairs. She was primitive in her ideas, perhaps, or she would not have thought such a thing. She looked up to her husband with old-fashioned reverence. Another

woman would have been forever throwing up her wealth as the source and beginning of the Lindsay power and prosperity. Aunt Estelle knew that the money invested in this place, her home now, had been trebled by the man to whom she brought it, and who paid her every mark of respect. She appreciated his quiet regard for her. She felt, in her heart, that she came first with him, always. The fact that she had no children had worried her for many years, and perhaps this was why she had a sneaking jealousy of Gertrude. She knew nothing save what her suspicions told her of Eric Lindsay's past—of his love and buried romance—but she had always felt that there was no rival to her with him save Gertrude. The very thought of Leigh Fenton queening it at Lindsay rather annoyed the good lady. True, she was beautiful and wealthy and patrician—all that could be desired in Hugh's wife. But she had no reverence for her elders, she snubbed her mother, and laughed at her father. Quietly, unobtrusively, indeed, but still this conduct, in Aunt Estelle's eyes, was a heinous crime, for she was not used to the ways of society. In her own manner Leigh Fenton imagined that she was kind enough to Mrs. Eric Lindsay. But Mrs. Eric Lindsay felt that she was too hard to understand, and when she looked at her with uncomprehending eyes, the young beauty smiled—as if out of pity for her crass ignorance, gazing down upon her from a lofty height. This nettled Aunt Estelle beyond words. No; she did not think she cared for Leigh Fenton.

And how was it with Hugh?

This love had come to him like a revelation. His future seemed bright only when he saw hers entwined with it. His future seemed desolate when he thought that perhaps she would not love him in return. He had not known how one woman could come into a man's life and bless it or mar it by her simple presence. The days passed for him like balls of crystal on a golden chain—one by one they dropped into the past, radiant because they had been blessed by her sweet smile. Thinking of days to come in which he would not see her, he shrank from them, so barren they appeared. He gave free rein to his love—the first

love of his honest soul. She was perfect in his eyes, gracious with all a woman's most gracious virtues. He exalted her, and looking up at her then, asked himself how she could ever condescend to humble herself to his level.

And Leigh Fenton knew every thought that was passing in her lover's mind. She was not the woman he thought her. She was shallow and vain—but neither was she wholly at fault for actions or thoughts or behavior. "One is what one has been taught to be," she had said to him, and such indeed was she. Spoiled and indulged on account of her striking beauty, with every good impulse made subservient to her position in the world, she had developed into a cold, cynical woman instead of the sweet and gentle creature God had intended her for. Nor would she listen to her good impulses, so that they came to her rarely and more rarely.

She had exhausted all the novelties of life, but Hugh's affection rather pleased her. He was so very sincere, and she was not used to sincerity. He was so devoted. She was used to devotion, but not Hugh's kind. He made her feel glad she was a woman—not sorry. And she really thought within herself that when the time came she would give him her promise, freely and willingly. His eyes were honest and true, she told herself. Honesty and truth might become monotonous after a time. But they would be new to her, and while the new sensation lasted—

But other moments came. Leigh Fenton had not played at love all her life without smirching her own fingers. And the love that she had known was so different to the simple attraction Hugh roused in her breast. For a brief season she had experienced woman's highest heritage. She had loved and been beloved. And often, when she looked at Hugh Lindsay, she put that other face—the face that filled her heart of hearts even yet—beside his. The comparison showed her how strongly the other had taken possession of her. She had disciplined herself well, but now, when she saw the inevitable looming before her, her father, her mother, Eric Lindsay, even Hugh himself, almost forcing her into this marriage—she passed many sorrowful hours. Hours of

torture. And often when Hugh came near her she felt that she hated him and treated him accordingly. Her variable moods perplexed him and tormented him, fed his heart with dangerous fuel. Did she smile, he was in the seventh heaven. Did she frown, his agony could not be told.

Uncle Eric would not have liked to tell Hugh one of the chief reasons that, in his eyes, made this marriage so desirable. Hugh was a Catholic, true. But Leigh was Protestant, of Protestant stock. In secret the old man had neither favor nor feeling partial to Roman Catholics. Hugh would never change—that he knew, but his children—Well, by the compromise of the parents the future heir of Lindsay might be of the right faith.

Which shows how far a man's hobby will carry him, ridden to death.

The elegant little suppers, the choice entertainments the old man gave now, made Lindsay Manor famous with some of its old-time prestige. It was the most sought out place in the State. Its beauty, its extent of grounds, its wonderful art treasures, the riches of its master, his good old name, were extolled to the skies.

And Hugh, having made up his mind that he would ask Leigh, at the first opportunity, to be his wife, turned longingly to the gentle heart that had been his comfort and his counselor, his refuge in trouble and the confidante of all his joys. It was his mother's right to know—even before he spoke to Leigh. He loved that mother too dearly not to consult her, or at least tell her, when he wished to so completely change his existence. He wrote to her—a gentle, tender, loving letter. He told her of Leigh—that she had already seen her—but that his picture failed to do her justice. He spoke of her beauty, her womanliness. He asked his mother to bless him in the step he was about to take, to pray for him. And all through the letter there was no hesitation. The die was cast. The mother knew, as she read those lines with eyes filled with tears, that her boy had made up his mind fully and completely, and that no word of hers, even could she say it now, would ever change it.

Feeling so she did not delay her answer. And it was a letter

that saddened him and made him very thoughtful. One phrase of hers he remembered as she had sat looking at Leigh's picture: “Oh, doesn't a mother *know*, child?” she had asked him, and he had unwillingly agreed with her, though he laid the blame to his faulty brush, and not to the fact that he had caught the girl's true expression.

“Your news was not unexpected, dear,” she wrote. “I have heard of Miss Fenton before this. Gertrude has spoken of her to me in her letters—I can not describe to you in what sweet words—of her beauty and of her graciousness, of her nobility and lovely character—”

“Gertrude!” thought the young man, with a rush of gratitude toward the girl, whom, during these past few days he felt he had woefully neglected. He was too wrapped up in other thoughts to realize that she avoided him. “Dear little Gertrude!”

“But still, my boy,” went on the mother. “I am not satisfied. She is not of our kind. She is a woman of the world, cultured, aristocratic, I grant you, possessing every advantage. But she looks at things with different eyes to you and to me. Your marriage will part us as effectually as if the ocean divided us.”

“Foolish mother!” murmured Hugh. “As if Leigh will not love her for her own sweet sake!”

“And then,” went on the wise counselor, “she lacks that most precious gift of all—our faith. Oh, Hugh, Hugh, do not let love blind your eyes to what you are doing. You will tell me your father and I were not of the same religion. An honest, purposeful woman can do much with such a man as your father was. He had the love of God and the fear of God in his heart always—and you can remember what a Catholic he was before he died. Oh, my child, bad hours come to every human soul, and much as your mother loves you, there will come those bad hours to you that no one but your wife may share. Will her dazzling beauty help you to bow your head to God's decrees? Will her gracious manner, her sweet smile, speak comfort when your heart is breaking? Only perfect trust in God can help a woman to help a man then—only faith and trust and honest religion—”

"Oh, mother!" whispered Hugh, half-sobbingly, for over the miles that separated them he seemed to hear her gentle voice in those last words. "Oh, my little mother."

"Unfortunately, now, dear, I must speak of more material things. You have prided yourself so on your independence. You will have to accept Uncle Eric's bounty if this marriage comes about. She, used to every luxury, will not be content to share your comparatively humble lot, nor could you expect it. Where would your income be with her expensive tastes? Thanks to your kindness in the past, dear boy, your mother has sufficient, France and Phil helping, to get along without further aid from you. But I am thinking of you—of your happiness. You can not be happy if you are not independent.

"Think over these things well, my own darling boy, before finally deciding. Whatever your heart tells you to do, do it then, for I know your honest heart too well to think it will ever lead you astray. No matter how you decide, you have your mother's love and prayers. If you consider this marriage for your happiness, I shall welcome Leigh Fenton as my son's wife, my own daughter. And may my blessing follow you and direct you and be to you a safeguard against evil and harm. God protect you, for every hair of your head is precious to me."

There were tears in Hugh's eyes when he finished this letter—tears that were no shame to him, and had there been the slightest hesitation on his part concerning the girl of his choice, that letter would have decided him against asking her to be his wife. His mother was a woman of few words, and he knew what it cost her to write in this manner. It was with a very sober face indeed that he paced slowly through the chestnut walk, which had become his favorite resort also by this time. It was here his uncle found him. How different was that uncle now from the hard-hearted, suspicious man of little more than a year ago! His eyes rested affectionately on his nephew's face.

"I am glad you are here, Hugh, my lad," he said. "There is less danger of an interruption, and I want to talk seriously to you. Have you time for a serious chat?"

"That depends altogether upon the subject," said Hugh, rather abruptly. "I wrote to my mother last week, and told her I intended to ask Miss Fenton to marry me. I have but just heard from her, and what she writes has given me food for thought."

"So!" said Uncle Eric in a preoccupied fashion. "Your mother—approves?"

"Of whatever I decide to do—yes. I don't mind telling you, uncle, or perhaps it is needless for me to do so by this time—that I love Leigh Fenton with my whole heart and soul—that I feel that my future happiness lies in her hands. Perhaps I may be mistaken, but I think she favors me a little—yes, I think I can say so without self-conceit."

"She is one woman in a thousand," said Uncle Eric, warmly. "Hugh, it is the earnest wish of my heart that you and Leigh Fenton marry."

"Thank you, uncle. But—"

"Oh, I know what you would say. It is the money question, eh? You will listen to your old uncle now, my boy, and let me arrange things on a more satisfactory basis. This is no time to let squeamishness and false pride come between us."

"Just a few seconds, uncle. I love Miss Fenton, yes. And I am no pauper. If she loves me she will be willing to do without a few unnecessary luxuries for my sake, and I am not a bit afraid to ask her to do so. I can give her a good home—perhaps not the frivolity she has been accustomed to—but comfort, even elegance. My wife must depend on me alone." He spoke proudly. "That is not what is troubling me."

"No?" Uncle Eric opened his eyes wide. "What, then?"

"Religion," returned the young man gloomily. "Two minds in one body—what a pitiful combination. Yet such are man and wife who are not alike in religious faith. We differ in this, the most important thing of all."

Uncle Eric threw back his head, laughing heartily.

"Religion! Why, boy, one would think you a priest from the way you talk! And you'd consider religion when aspiring to a girl like Leigh Fenton! Religion, of all things! Are you crazy?"

"No; I am far from it. I have decided to ask Miss Fenton to marry me because I love her as I can never love another woman. But she will agree beforehand that our children, if God gives us any, will be of my faith and believing."

He spoke so decidedly that his uncle felt that he could not contend with him. As well break his head against a stone wall as argue with this independent young man. He stroked his moustache reflectively.

"Religion is, after all, a matter of form," he said. "Really that, and nothing more. I would not be too positive about that when I addressed Miss Fenton. After you are married it will be easy for you to have your own way—"

"I will not marry any woman who does not understand just what I intend to do," said Hugh.

"Ah, well!" Again Uncle Eric bent thoughtful eyes to the ground. "It would not influence you in the slightest, I suppose, if you knew that I preferred your children to be Protestants?" he asked.

Hugh swung on him savagely.

"No, no, no—a thousand times, no! I wouldn't sell the soul of one of my children for all South Carolina, let alone Lindsay Manor. My faith is more to me than you, Uncle Eric, than wealth, than Leigh Fenton herself, dear as she is."

"You needn't be so emphatic," said Uncle Eric, rather dryly. "Let things rest the way they are for the present. Perhaps—When do you intend asking the young lady, if I am not too inquisitive?"

"I don't know. Whenever circumstances favor me," said Hugh, more quietly.

"Harry or Laurence would have consented to bring their boys up as Turks," declared Uncle Eric to his wife later. "I respect Hugh—at times I am almost convinced that there is something I do not quite understand in that religion of his."

"Humph!" said Aunt Estelle, her Methodist backbone stiffening. "He should have a little regard for your wishes, at least, Eric. I don't see how you can stand him. Not but what

it is more wholesome,” she went on hastily, seeing the anger rising in his face. “Perhaps it is better he is that way.”

Hugh wrote to his mother—as tender a letter as she had written to him. He reminded her of that afternoon when he had first come back from Lindsay and the words she had spoken then—that “love was the only thing in the world.” He gave a brief, sharp outline of what Uncle Eric’s life had been without it. Tender and loving and reverent words he wrote, so that she wept over them bitterly, for she knew her son’s heart was lost to her. And indeed, even as he had written those lines his sweetheart’s face rose before him, and he laid down the pen to think of her.

Only last evening he had seen her, clad in the simple, flowing draperies she affected, the gracious center of an absorbed little crowd. And they had spoken of love—love, the all-powerful. And some among them mocked at it, when she, with simple speech, took up arms in its favor. How sweet had been her words, how her voice had thrilled him! And when she finished she raised her starry eyes straight to his, and there was something in their depths that made him tremble. Oh, they were created for each other—he and she. In mutual love they would, they must perfect each other. His mother, too, would help him to bring God’s knowledge to that innocent, sleeping soul, those beautiful hands would be raised to heaven in union with her husband’s.

And so he finished the letter in braver spirit.

CHAPTER XII.

GERTRUDE'S TRIAL.

THE old Manor was in its very bravest array, alight from top to bottom, for Uncle Eric had issued invitations for a dance. The rooms rivaled fairyland in the beauty of their decorations, and so keen had the master of Lindsay been to make this the most talked of affair in many a year that he had spent more money than he would care to tell the provident Madam Lindsay. The house was filled with the best people, and the lady of the Manor, robed in soft black silk, with diamonds glittering upon her still graceful figure, looked for once in keeping with her setting. Mildred Powell, beautiful and stately, stood with her at the head of the room. Gertrude had not yet come down, and Mrs. Lindsay was flustered and impatient. She had spoken to Mildred sharply once or twice, the last time with a high note of anger in her voice.

"Never mind, Aunt Estelle," said Mildred, soothingly. "She is probably somewhere about—don't worry—"

"But every one is asking for her— How do you do, Mr. Blane? Miss Waring? She will be down directly—perhaps she is outside even now. Her uncle likes to keep her with him, as you know. Good evening, Miss Lenyard. Gertrude? You will see her in a moment. Mrs. Lenyard is well? Ah, indeed, sorry, I'm sure. Yes, thank you, yes—I am very well. Mildred, send some one for Gertrude immediately. This is not to be tolerated another second—I will not bear it."

A moment later Mrs. Lindsay's maid knocked at Gertrude's door.

"I'm trying to get rid of a headache," said Miss Waring. "Will you tell Mrs. Lindsay that I shall be down in ten minutes? And—Julie?"

"Yes, miss?"

"I know you're busy, but ask Aunt Hannah to pour me a cup of tea, like a good girl? I want it very strong and black. Thank you."

"You're welcome, Miss Gertrude." The girl lingered at the door a moment and Gertrude looked up wearily.

"I can come up and rub your head, miss, a little, if you will allow me," she said, hesitatingly. "It always does Mrs. Lindsay's headaches good."

"You dear girl—and you so busy, too!" said Gertrude, gratefully. "Just get the tea—it will be all right."

The maid withdrew, and Gertrude turned to the window again. She was fully dressed. Her simple white robe fell about her in soft folds, but her face was very pale, and her eyes tired. Her little ungloved hands lay in her lap listlessly, and she was looking out across to the Lindsay woods, with such a forlorn expression that it must have moved any heart to see her.

"Oh, if I only didn't have to go down," she said in a faint voice. "Oh, if I didn't—have—to—go—down." She twisted her head wearily. "If I could cry—I was such a baby, I could cry so easily a year ago. And now there is no way to lift this heavy burden that rests on my heart and is eating at it—no way at all. I am afraid I can't stand it much longer—I just can't stand it!"

She pressed her hands to her eyes and was sitting so when Julie came in with the tray. The beverage was fresh and steaming, and Gertrude sipped at it greedily.

"You do look bad, Miss Gertrude," said Julie. "Perhaps you'd better let me tell Mrs. Lindsay you aren't well—"

"No, no, no. I'm better even now, Julie. What! Miss the great dance—the very greatest given in Lindsay Manor in years? What are headaches compared to that, you foolish Julie!"

She rose to her feet and looked at her face a moment in the

glass. Then she rubbed her cheeks violently with both hands and bit her lips.

"That color won't stay, Miss Gertrude," said Julie.

"Oh, yes, it will, when I get excited—I must try to get excited. Then I shall be belle of the ball. But I forgot—Miss Fenton is coming."

"Is it true, Miss Gertrude, that Mr. Hugh is to marry Miss Fenton?"

"I think it is, Julie. She is very beautiful and sweet, isn't she? We'll have a wedding at Lindsay Manor! Do you know I have never been to a wedding in all my life? Where are my gloves—oh, I see. And my fan. And the red roses Hugh sent up to me. Aren't they pretty? He is so thoughtful always, my Cousin Hugh—he cut every one of these himself."

She was animated enough now, poor child, as she brought the glowing flowers to her face. The maid watched her leave the room. Gertrude was well-beloved in Lindsay Manor, and more than one had noticed the change in her of late.

"It's my opinion she's going to be down with a fit of sickness," said Julie, as she picked up the tea-tray and departed.

At the entrance of the ballroom Gertrude stood a moment, and her heart went back to this great apartment on the day Hugh Lindsay first came to the Manor. Ah, how happy she would be, if it were only God's will, to be quietly lying where Harold Lindsay was to-night! There was happiness and contentment—only there.

Hugh Lindsay, with Leigh Fenton at his side, came up to her just then. She looked about her for some way of escape, but found none, and so stood there quietly, watching them approach. She had taught her lips to smile when her heart was aching, and this was but another exercise of the lesson she had learned.

"Aunt Estelle told me you were ill, little cousin," said Hugh, gravely.

"A slight headache. It is gone now, thank you."

She saw the roses in Miss Fenton's hand. They were crimson roses—the exact counterpart of those she held, and looking at

them brought Hugh's kindly thought to her mind. She raised her soft brown eyes to his face.

"How did you know I liked roses?" she asked. "Red roses? Thank you for these, Hugh—they are so pretty."

Hugh smiled, but Leigh Fenton's eyes kindled, and her fingers tightened a little about her fan. She looked at Gertrude with a very devil of mockery in her violet eyes.

"I wasn't aware of the fact that you distributed your favors impartially," she said to Hugh, in her smoothest tones. Gertrude took the shaft bravely. She turned the most innocent little face in the world on the beauty.

"I didn't think such a trifle could worry *you*," she said. "But if the giving of these by my cousin to me annoys you any, why—Forgive me, Hugh." She smiled, and brought the flowers to her lips, threw them carelessly into a chair behind her, and with head high in air, walked away and left them.

For one moment a crimson stain mounted to Leigh Fenton's forehead. She had not counted on such a return, and one of the sticks in her fan snapped violently under the pressure of her fingers. But she had been well-trained, and her composure, after that first involuntary flush, was perfect. No one could deem, seeing her, that she was in a passionate temper.

"What a child she is!" she murmured, softly. "An untrained child! We must forgive children everything."

Hugh was perplexed. He looked after Gertrude. The passage at arms had been so brief and so sudden that he scarcely had time to realize what had happened until it was all over. Leigh's gentle words made him feel annoyed at Gertrude's conduct. He thought her speech in very bad taste.

Not so annoyed or vexed or angry was he at Gertrude as the girl was at herself, however. She was in a wild rage, for she knew that Leigh Fenton was only trying, on every occasion, to make her angry, jealous. In her heart of hearts she felt that the beauty half-guessed her secret. Oh, how lovely she was, she thought now, despairingly. And Hugh cared so much for her. If only he had chosen some one more worthy of him than Leigh

Fenton! If he had only chosen some one, any one—any one, who was true at heart, and honest, and of his faith! Poor Hugh, poor Hugh, how awful the disillusionment when it came!

A moment later she herself was entertaining her uncle's guests, with spirits as lively and voice as animated as any among them all. Gertrude was a pretty girl, she was charming and gentle, and there were some who could see more loveliness in her dainty face than in the classical beauty of Leigh Fenton.

"You are of a forgiving disposition," Hugh was saying to Leigh now. "Gertrude *is* a child at heart. I imagine she thinks herself grown up this last few months—but the baby breaks out in her, as you have seen."

"In the future let us hope things will be different," said Leigh. She had recovered herself fully now.

"In the future? Ah, let us hope things will be very different," he said in a low voice.

"*Very* different?" with a sweep upward of her long lashes.

"*Very* different," he answered, much moved. "And happier. But that can only be if you put this little hand in mine."

"You are modest. Here is my hand now—for the next dance, if you care for it."

"Thank you; I accept it gladly—you honor me, Miss Fenton. But I want it longer than that—I want it always."

"Always? That is a word I am afraid of."

"The word forever would be more appropriate. I want your hand forever—in life and during life and beyond it."

"We know each other such a short while," she answered. Her eyes were shining, her heart was really beating excitedly.

"Such a short while! How can you say that if you love me, Leigh? I have longed so to speak to you—to tell you how much I care for you—to ask you to love me in return."

His honest face was turned to her in perfect frankness.

"I have never spoken like this to any woman—you are *my* first love. Leigh, believe me, and bid me hope."

Her eyes sought his quickly as if she would read his very soul. Just a glance, but the question, the dread in it, stirred some

power in his nature that had never before been touched. But she cast them down just as quickly and stood silent, lost in thought. How calm she was, listening to words that would decide her future! A great longing came over her to say "Yes" to him at once, without delay, to yield to her woman's longing for protection, to creep into the shelter of his loving arms, and shut out the world she knew forever. Perhaps this was true love—she was happy now, happier than she had been for a long, long while.

"Have you no words to say to me?" he asked at last, almost sadly.

"What words can I say?" she questioned him in return, in a dreamy tone. "You have swept me into another sphere, out of myself. Give me time to recover—to look about me. To-morrow—"

"To-morrow! Will you know more about me than you do to-night?"

"But myself, Hugh, myself!" The name escaped her involuntarily, and a glad light leaped into his eyes. "I must give up myself, my freedom. What has a man to offer in return for a woman's whole soul? Be reasonable—I can not—"

"Reasonable? In love? Leigh, I don't want your reason—I want your heart, your whole heart. Tell me what your heart says, beloved—then defer your final answer until to-morrow, if you will."

She looked about the gay room, nodded smilingly to one or two ladies who passed her with laughing sallies—then brought her eyes to the earnest gaze of the man standing at her side.

"My heart? Do you think I carry my heart with me into a ballroom? Come to me to-morrow when I have my heart with me. Perhaps—"

"Leigh! You do not dismiss me, then? And now—"

"Now I shall. I must have one more night of freedom—I dismiss you to-night. Go to your Cousin Gertrude, to your aunt, to Mildred, to any one. To-night is mine, and if you love me, Hugh," she smiled tenderly over the word, "you will leave it to me. My last night of freedom—perhaps."

She bowed then to a gentleman whom she saw approaching and left Hugh. He gazed after her with loving eyes, dazed with his own happiness. What an elusive creature she was! What a wonderful thing that she was going to give up her youth, her beauty, her gifts, to him—to give her sweet young life into his keeping forever. Might God make him worthy of the gift.

He withdrew into a corner, hoping to stand there unobserved, to hug his happiness to him in quiet peace—to let its full realization sweep over him, to get used to it, before others knew it or could comment upon it. He meant to obey her fully. She should be free to-night, since after to-morrow she would belong to but one, and that one himself. To-night she was theirs—they could enjoy her beauty and her wit. To-morrow she would be his and his alone.

How long he stood in silent reverie he did not know. For a long, long time, it seemed to him. He did not heed the casual glances cast in his direction, nor did he think of the surmises this standing apart from the others might give rise to—for Hugh had never been one to measure his conduct according to the criticisms of others. But a lady passing tapped him gaily with her fan.

"Your aunt wishes you to go to her, Mr. Lindsay," she said, "she is beckoning."

"Thank you," said Hugh. He found his aunt alone with Mildred Powell. She sent him with a message to Uncle Eric, and when he had delivered it, he made his way back again to her side.

"What a brilliant assemblage," he said to Mildred. "I have never seen so many beautiful women. I am surprised that you are not dancing. Where is your cavalier?"

"He is not here, Cousin Hugh," she returned, lightly.

"He is a lacking wooer then, fair cousin," smiling. "Why not make the best of what you have? There are many willing to console you."

She laughed.

"I grant that, Cousin Hugh. But when there is but one face in your heart, one voice filling your ears, the others tire you."

She spoke almost gaily, and he gazed at her with tender eyes.

From personal experience now he knew how true that was. And he knew, too, something of her faithfulness and of her sincerity. He changed the conversation abruptly, looking about him once more.

"See how Gertrude is enjoying herself!" he said. "Hasn't that child developed?"

"Gertrude is not a child now, Hugh—she is a woman."

"I can scarcely believe it—she still seems the little wayward child to me. There—she has seen us. Who is that with her? Bayard Cameron? He likes Gertrude, doesn't he?"

Mildred bent her head with a warning glance toward Aunt Estelle. Fortunately that lady had not been listening. Mildred lowered her voice then.

"He wants to marry Gertrude," she said, speaking very softly, "and Gertrude doesn't want to marry him. How contrary things are in this world! Aunt Estelle's heart is set on the match. It is simply a question of how long Gertie can hold out."

"Forever, I hope, if she doesn't care for him," began Hugh, but Gertrude came toward them now, flashing, dimpling, her eyes like stars.

"Mr. Cameron, you are just boring me to death; boring me, and I refuse to be bored!" She darted forward and drew herself up as high as she could beside Hugh, tossing her curly head. "I claim my cousin's protection!"

"What is it all about?" asked Hugh, smiling at the young man—for what he read in his face made him feel wondrously kind toward him, with a sense of companionship and understanding. "Tell me what it is all about."

"This tiresome fellow has his name down for three dances—*three*, Cousin Hugh! And he has the unparalleled audacity to want *three* more! Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Hugh, put your name down in those vacant places immediately!" She held her tablet out toward him as she spoke. "Not that I intend dancing them with you, indeed—I don't promise that. See, Mr. Cameron, my card is filled!"

No one could help laughing at the inimitable grace of speech and movement. Bayard Cameron, looking at her with his heart in his eyes, shrugged his shoulders.

"I bow to your decree—for the present," he said, "but I notice that two of your cousin's dances follow mine. If I fail to return her to you in time, Mr. Lindsay—"

"I shall hold you accountable, Mr. Cameron," said Hugh. "My little cousin gave me those dances evidently under the impression that she would have that much time to herself. Unfortunately for her I shall make her keep her word. And this is mine—this coming one. Allow me, Gertrude."

He took her hand in his as the music started, and left Mildred and Bayard Cameron together, looking after them with smiling lips. Gertrude shook her head.

"You are very bold," she said.

"Carrying you away from your sweetheart in this fashion—is that what you mean?" he asked, teasingly.

"Yes; that is what I mean," she answered. "How did you dare to leave Miss Fenton for so long?"

"You do not like Miss Fenton, Gertrude?" was his cross-question.

She looked at him with her honest eyes.

"No, Hugh, I do not like Miss Fenton."

"I am sorry, Gertrude—more sorry than words can say. May I ask why?"

"You may—but let us stop dancing—I don't want to dance. See, there are two seats," pointing to a bower of palms at the end of the ballroom. "I had not thought you would care for a woman like Leigh Fenton, Hugh—I am surprised," she added, seating herself beside him, and speaking in a slow, deliberate fashion he scarcely recognized as Gertrude's. "She is such a butterfly—so untrue to the principles which I know are dearer to you than your life. So untrue—" she hesitated.

"Well?"

"Untrue to herself—untrue to the impulses of her better nature, if she has one," said the girl then, recklessly and bitterly.

"I have no respect for her—I never did have any and she knows it, and she hates me. Just as much as I hate her she hates me. I know Leigh Fenton longer than you, cousin."

"Oh, Gertrude!" He said the name in a hurt, pained voice, and she felt that he was condemning her for so miserable a fault as traducing her neighbor. It seemed to rob her of all the self-control she possessed.

"It is not because she is beautiful," she said, rapidly. "Do not think I talk so because she is prettier than I am. I think her the most lovely girl I have ever seen, and I would pray, did not her actions hurt me so in hurting those I care for, that her soul might be as lovely as her face. But she is an actress to the core. Can't you see it? Are you blind? She is all brilliant speech—there is no depth to her, none. That you, Hugh Lindsay, whom I have looked up to as so wise, can be so blind, can be so—oh, you sicken me! I would be ashamed—"

"Gertrude!" he exclaimed. "I hope to marry Miss Fenton," he went on, gravely. "As my future wife she stands now in such sacred relationship to me that I can listen to no further word of yours—"

"Hugh! She has promised to *marry* you?" Her eyes dilated—her bosom heaved.

"Almost. To-morrow I am to receive her answer."

"You are making no mistake? Oh, Hugh, for your own sake, be careful—she has really *listened* to you?"

"Gertrude, you are wearing out my patience—I warn you I am at the end of it. Either explain yourself, or say not another word. Is there anything between you and Miss Fenton that you detest her so? Or is it childish spite, petulance, freakishness on your part—"

"Oh, Hugh, no, it is nothing. I am—astonished, Hugh. Perhaps," she bit her lips a little before she said, bravely, "perhaps I misjudged her. I thought she was just leading you on, to make a laughing-stock of you as she has done so— Oh, Hugh, she is really going to *marry* you? Does your mother know? Have you told her anything—"

"Mother knows," said Hugh, gravely. "She wrote to me and told me how you, Gertrude, had praised my—Leigh, extolling her to the skies. Praised her beauty, her virtues, her gifts. Child, what sort of an enigma are you, anyway? What do you mean?"

"I praised her to your mother, Hugh, not because I believed my own words, but because I wished to help you," said Gertrude, in a low, almost humble tone. "I thought, as I have told you, that she was leading you on, and that in the end she would send you about your business—for indeed, dear Hugh, Leigh Fenton is reputed to have a fickle disposition. I would not have had your dear mother grateful for your pain—sorry for you, but glad in her heart that she would not wed you. No. I thought when the blow fell that you would go home, and that your mother would mourn with you the gracious, kindly girl who could not marry because she did not love."

Her voice sank to a whisper. A mist swam suddenly before Hugh's eyes, as he looked into Gertrude's faithful heart. Because he was her friend, her cousin, she would even guard him against his own mother.

"My little girl, my little girl!" he said. "Oh, how can two such noble natures as yours and hers misunderstand each other? You and she must try to overcome those miserable shadows that hide all better qualities—you and Leigh should know each other, and knowing then would surely love. Ah, Gertrude, who am I that dare expect such a woman as Leigh Fenton to marry me? Look what she will give up for me—her home, her brilliant station—"

"She has said—that?" asked Gertrude in almost breathless astonishment.

"Not yet, dear. But she will—she loves me, I think. I know what a sacrifice it will be for her, but I shall repay it by a life's devotion. And it will not be long until she has her old luxuries. I will work so hard—"

"If she loves you, Hugh—"

"God grant it, Gertrude. There is much she will do for me,

then. ‘Women, if they love us, forgive us even our crimes,’ some one has said. Pray that I may be worthy of her love.”

* * * * *

“Worthy of her love—worthy of *her* love,” said Gertrude, alone in her own room that night. “I wonder what she means now? She is false, oh, how false! False to every one. Will she be true to him, to Hugh? *Can* she be true to any living soul? Oh, I hate her, I hate her, I hate her!” she cried aloud. “Dear God in heaven, how happy I was until she came. Even when I knew the truth—that I loved Hugh, that I love him and will love him until I die—even then it did not matter. Until *she* came. And that it should be *she* whom my poor Hugh loves! Oh, how I hate her!”

She threw herself on her knees beside her bed and burst into a passion of tears. They were soothing tears, withal, and they calmed the pain at her heart and eased her aching brain, and bore away with them the bitter feelings that had been surging through her all that evening of the sorest trial of her life. She folded her hands meekly, and lifted her brave, wet eyes to the crucifix hanging above her pillow.

“I will not hate her, Lord. Forgive me—forgive my wickedness. Make her worthy of Hugh. Make her good—make her love him—love my dear cousin, my dear friend, because if she loves him, she will be good. Let her forget everything, dear Father up in heaven—only let her love Hugh, and be good.”

CHAPTER XIII.

WHICH TREATS PRINCIPALLY OF MILDRED.

WHEN, the next day, Hugh called on his sweetheart, he found an altogether different being to the one who had almost played with him the previous evening. As he sat alone waiting for her in the long, cool parlor, despite his strength and manliness, he fell to wishing that she would not keep him many minutes. Love and its attending nervousness may be a thing to jest about, indeed—but not when one is the victim.

She came to him, though, without delay—and alone. His heart leaped when he looked at her—for he read his answer in her face as she stood just inside the door, gazing at him with beautiful, soft eyes. Then she held out her hands, and he came forward and took them in his own, raising them to his lips reverently.

“This means—yes, Leigh?” he asked.

“It means yes, Hugh,” she returned. “Oh, Hugh, dear, I think I am almost glad to say yes.”

“Do you?”

“I know what it means—I have studied it all out—in fact, I never slept a wink all night thinking what I should do.” She raised her eyes again to his face, and spoke words she knew would thrill him to the soul. “It means a change for me—a complete change. But I shall give myself to you, dear—your people shall be my people—and your faith my faith. Yes,” as he gave a joyous exclamation, “do you think I have not seen how deeply that concerned you? After I am married to you, you shall teach me—and I will learn from you. I will do everything you want me to. But I make one condition—”

“And that is—”

“That no one else finds place in your heart,” she finished. Almost too happy for speech, he put his arms about her. She was more than the woman he had thought her! What a nature, simple as a child’s!

And now there began for him such a fortnight of days as human beings rarely enjoy—and only those who loved as Hugh Lindsay loved.

Mrs. Fenton was delighted, and the Colonel gave his consent right willingly. There was, of course, some very tender speech-making when the momentous event was announced—speech-making that Hugh took in all seriousness, but that sent Leigh Fenton into a convulsion of laughter. The master of Lindsay, almost as pleased as the happy man himself, wished to have the engagement made public immediately. Mrs. Fenton would not permit this. There were distant relatives to be written to; Leigh’s sister must be informed. And then there was the ex-Senator! Every one knew that Leigh was the ex-Senator’s favorite niece. She must write to him at once, and invite him on immediately to see Leigh’s betrothed. All announcements must be deferred until this important person could be communicated with.

After an interview with Leigh’s father, the master of Lindsay spoke seriously of making his will. The Fentons, despite the strain of sentimentality in their daughter, were not wedding her to any one but the heir of the Lindsay possessions. Hugh himself was a secondary consideration, and Hugh, being no fool, partly realized this. But he was too happy to let it annoy him in any way. He and Leigh understood each other. She, at least, was above all sordidness. His star was a world that had opened its heart to him—therefore he loved it.

* * * * *

The brother-in-law of Colonel Willoughby Fenton, and uncle to Leigh, his “favorite niece” according to Mrs. Willoughby Fenton, was ex-Senator Lewis Hilliard. He was a stout man, with a rubicund visage that spoke well for his taste in the pleasures of the table. His head was slightly bald, his eyes bright and

twinkling, and he had a very keen sense of humor. The honorable Lewis Hilliard had been the member for South Carolina twice, and during the last nine or ten years had been enjoying the fruits of what he called an honestly-earned old age, though, indeed, he was not old—far from it. The fondness for traveling which showed itself in Leigh was even more fully developed in her uncle, so that Kentboro saw him but rarely. Singularly enough, his sister's letter, apprising him of Leigh's engagement, and forwarded to him from his banker's, telling him that its formal announcement would be deferred until his arrival, reached him just when he was thinking of home. It was at Monte Carlo. He had arrived there from Nice in company with the young man who lounged indolently on the couch in his sitting-room, listening to him chuckling over his mail.

“That means a handsome present from the bachelor uncle, Al,” he said, throwing the letter over to him with a dry laugh. “Read it.”

The young man picked it up and read it through, tossing it carelessly back again.

“Are you going?”

The ex-Senator yawned.

“Oh, sure, to-morrow. Might as well. I'm tired of this place already—it is apt to become unbearable in a few days. Come with me.”

The young man settled himself more comfortably.

“I? Not I, thank you. Heaven keep me from family congratulations. Ta, ta, uncle. If you get back within the next six weeks I expect to be still here. If not, a long farewell.”

“Oh, we'll come together again somehow,” laughed the other carelessly. “Queer thing how we always turn up in each other's company, isn't it?”

They were companions by chance at first—this last few months by choice. But they were not deeply attached to each other, for they had little in common. Senator Hilliard packed his trunk, settled his hotel bill, and left for the States.

* * * * *

"Do you think we have done wisely?" asked Mrs. Fenton, with a "you-know-it-all" expression on her handsome face. Her brother had attended a supper at Lindsay Manor the night before, and had been introduced to Hugh. And now Mrs. Fenton, feeling that she could decently venture to do so, came to question him. "It is so hard for a mother to judge, Lewis," she ended with a sigh.

The broad-shouldered, well-built man threw back his head, laughing uproariously.

"Oh, I say, Helen, pile on the mother act light, will you? I think you and Leigh know what you are doing. You have been fortunate as well as wise this time. She is making a brilliant match."

"Yes; Lindsay Manor is no small inheritance, Lewis. I never realized how big it was until lately—we have been home so little since Leigh finished her education. At first they may not be in good circumstances—"

"Oh, his uncle will attend to things—he likes Hugh. I could see that from the way he acted last evening. There was another nephew, wasn't there? I have heard all sorts of conflicting stories—"

"Yes. His name was Laurence—dead, I believe. He left the Manor some eight years ago—I never met him. And then there was Harry, the wild fellow who is buried about a year now. But last night you seemed so strange. I thought you did not care for Hugh."

Mr. Hilliard stretched his legs, putting his hands in his pockets, and contemplating her with a serious face.

"To tell you the truth, Helen, I am not used to associating with such uncompromisingly honest men. I am astonished at Leigh caring for so worthy a fellow. As a companion—well, I wouldn't want him as a companion of mine, but as a husband for the somewhat reckless Leigh he will do admirably well."

"That is just it," said Mrs. Fenton. She looked up as a tall, thin man entered the room. It was her husband. "We are speaking of Leigh. I am glad she is to marry at last. At heart she is

so romantic—I was always afraid of some outlandish freak. I have very often thought—”

“What?” asked the ex-Senator.

“Oh, never mind,” she said, hastily. “Leigh is a dreamer, isn’t she, Will?”

“A sentimental, foolish creature,” he returned, in high, sharp tones. “There’s a soft streak in her somewhere, and she never got it from me.”

Indeed, looking at the spare, hard-featured man, no one would accuse him of anything so trifling as a grain of sentiment.

“And she didn’t get it from me,” declared Lewis Hilliard. “You must be the guilty one, Helen.”

Mrs. Fenton shrugged her shoulders.

“She is the most beautiful girl in the county, and she has Hugh Lindsay under her thumb. That is sufficient,” she answered, indifferently.

“What does Leigh say about it all?” asked Hilliard, curiously.

“Leigh? Oh, she is living in a little world of her own. Of things on this mundane sphere she has no cognizance.”

“Eric Lindsay’s wife is an awful relative for any girl—especially a girl as proud as Leigh, by Jove!” said Hilliard. “I was talking to her last night—she’s positively uneducated.”

“Only for the money Eric Lindsay’s wife brought him we couldn’t consider Hugh—so let that pass,” said Mrs. Fenton. “I think Leigh really cares for him, Lewis—why, what are you laughing at?”

For Lewis Hilliard, at that word, threw himself back into his chair and roared. Nor did he cease until the tears rolled down his cheeks.

* * * * *

Uncle Eric would have made a wonderful celebration out of his nephew’s engagement to Leigh Fenton. But Lewis Hilliard asked, as a special favor, that all festivities be confined to the family alone, and as his views coincided with those of the prospective bridegroom, they carried the day. And even some of the immediate family sent regrets. Leigh’s sister could not come,

nor Hugh's mother, who did not feel equal to the journey, she wrote. So that Uncle Eric had things his own way on this joyous occasion.

It certainly should be a joyous occasion, and every one helped to make it as pleasant as possible for the engaged pair. At the dinner Senator Hilliard was seated between Aunt Estelle and Mildred. The title Senator, was sweet on the lips of the former lady, and she rolled it over and over as many times as she could in conscience. Knowing what a globe-trotter he was, she wished to show the knowledge she possessed. Compared to Lewis Hilliard's it was very meager. The ex-Senator listened to her with a half-sarcastic smile playing about his lips as he answered her, and led her on to further betray her ignorance. Mildred, glancing up, saw Eric Lindsay's eyes fastened on his wife and her partner with a rather distressed look, Mildred thought. She immediately turned to the portly man, directing his attention to his niece with a laughing remark. She had not forgotten her woman's ways if she had laid them aside with the joys of life. She set about fascinating this rather oldish, good-looking gentleman, fully satisfied it would not harm him. And she succeeded so well that even after dinner he found himself listening to her with delight. She weighed her words very carefully, and their sound good sense pleased him.

"You are a relief—an oasis in the desert," he said to her when he came up from—epicure as he professed to be—one of the best dinners he had ever eaten. "And I have been wandering in foreign lands ten years, unconscious that so rare a jewel existed almost at my own hearth! You are all that is—"

"Don't call me sensible," she said, "or I shall never forgive you."

"Charming, entertaining, altogether agreeable," he finished with a laugh. "The gentlemen are not interested in me—I am out of their lives, since I have been out of the county. The engaged couple—now, look at them."

He nodded toward the corner where sat Hugh and Leigh, totally absorbed in each other. The beautiful face was raised to

her lover's. She was speaking rapidly and he was drinking in every word.

“Indeed, they seem to be very happy. How pretty your niece is, Senator.”

“Lovely, animated, enthusiastic—”

“Yes. Perhaps that is why she attracted Hugh. He is calm and steadfast, she flyaway and capricious.”

“But good-hearted, very good-hearted. Do you not agree with me?”

“I am no judge,” she answered, somewhat coldly.

“Umph!” thought Senator Hilliard. “That sounds peculiar—just like a woman. Wonder what she has against Leigh?”

“You are quite a traveler,” said Mildred, sweetly.

“I might be so considered if ten years of it count for anything. I come now from Monte Carlo.”

“From Monte Carlo?”

“Are you shocked? Perhaps I should have kept that to myself.”

“Oh, no. I am not prejudiced. Do you gamble?”

“What an old-fashioned way of putting it, Miss Mildred! When I think I am going on in years I seek Monte Carlo and venture a trifle on the red-and-black. It restores my youth—the excitement is so refreshing.”

“I should like to watch the players. They say it is as interesting to watch as to play.”

“It is. And one meets such extraordinary characters! You have no idea. One among them—a young fellow I met about three years ago in a peculiar manner, has interested me more than all others put together. And I am considered a student of character.”

“A foreigner, probably?”

“Yes—an Englishman, of Scotch parentage. His name is Allan Fraser.”

The room swirled before her; a noise as of many waters sounded in her ears. The lights and the faces and the flowers rushed together in one confused mass. But the ex-Senator only

noticed that she bent over her dress, tracing out the design on it with one long, slender finger. He imagined she did it to show the beauty of her white hand, and resolved to let her know that he appreciated its loveliness at the first opportunity. He thought her voice rather indistinct, however, when she finally spoke.

“Allan Fraser?” she asked.

“It surely is not possible you know him?” said the Senator, quickly.

“The name is very—familiar to me.” She spoke with little pauses, as if thoroughly absorbed in tracing the raised leaves on her dress. “I do not know him personally. A man of that name was in Costa Rica about—let me see—almost three years ago now, I think—with—with—an acquaintance of mine.”

“Costa Rica? Three years ago? Yes. I remember that he told me that he had been in Costa Rica—had done some fighting there. I don’t wonder at it. He’s the most fiery fellow I have ever met. His fist is always ready. At Monte Carlo, I remember one night when he—”

“Are you positive that he said that he was in Costa Rica? The name— It might be somebody else—”

“Come now, Miss Mildred, what is this? A romance? Do you know him?”

“I should certainly have no reason to deny it if I did,” she answered, somewhat stiffly. “Is he in England, now?”

“In England! He never goes near it. He has been ill-treated by some of his relatives, I believe. Just a globe-trotter like myself. A soldier of fortune, doing the first thing that comes to hand. We lived together in the Hotel de Russe. He was there when I left Monte Carlo.”

“Hotel de Russe!” she repeated mechanically. The ex-Senator looked at her and his eyes twinkled again. There was some mystery behind all this. “R—u—s—s—e—is that right?”

“Yes. Strange how you interest yourself in this Englishman, Miss Mildred. I am going back in a few weeks myself. May I carry a message for you?” jestingly.

She smiled coldly.

"I told you Mr. Fraser was the companion in Costa Rica of one who died out there of fever. I am interested only in so far as he can give me news of the friend who is dead."

"A theme sung of by the poets—womanly fidelity," said ex-Senator Hilliard, in a piqued tone. She blushed crimson and was glad indeed that Hugh and Leigh approached at this embarrassing moment.

"How charmingly you are entertaining this fastidious old uncle of mine," said Leigh, patting the ex-Senator's arm. "What are you talking of? We were noticing how intimate the conversation seemed. Let us share the interest with you?"

"I am telling Miss Mildred of Monte Carlo," said Mr. Hilliard. "Just to talk of it makes me happy."

"Perhaps more happy than a protracted stay might leave you," observed Hugh, drily.

"Well, you have but to die once, and why not at Monte Carlo?" asked Mr. Hilliard, nonchalantly. "At least it will be something to bring the remembrance of pleasures enjoyed to the other side when we finally have to go. It is a changing, ever-varying, kaleidoscopic scene—"

"Disgusting and demoralizing," said Hugh.

"Only to the moralist," said the ex-Senator, in the same dry voice. "I don't agree with them—and from your remark I suppose you do? *I*, as a keen observer of human nature, enjoy it."

"Human nature's worst side," again interrupted Hugh. He did not like his sweetheart's uncle.

But the ex-Senator let this pass.

"I was telling Miss Powell of a friend I left there—a man who is far from being an example of virtue. But as a companion he is worth a hundred. His name is Fraser."

"Fraser!" repeated Hugh. He looked quickly at Mildred, knowing at once why she seemed so very pale, and moved nearer to her. He felt that she was suffering, and the instinct to protect all suffering things had ever been paramount with him.

"*Et, tu?*" laughed Mr. Hilliard. "All you people seem to know that name. I am sure Leigh remembers him, don't you?"

At Rome, three years ago—it was the year after you graduated—and we went to Rome, you and your mother and I?"

She shook her head. Her face was absolutely non-committal.

"I do not remember, uncle."

"Oh, pshaw, you do so. The violinist, Fraser, Allan Fraser."

"I do not remember," she said again.

"Tell us about him," said Hugh.

"It is a romantic story. A strange violinist—an Italian—was giving a concert with a friend. The violinist was supposed to be a master, and quite a good audience attended. The friend played the piano brilliantly, and after playing got up and announced that the fiddler was too ill to appear. You remember now, Leigh?"

She did not answer him.

"It was quite a mistake on the pianist's part. The people screamed and shouted and whistled and wanted their money back—an Italian audience is very excitable. Suddenly a handsome fellow in the first row jumped up and made his way to the platform, where poor Signor Valdini stood trembling. He held up his hand for silence, and in the worst Italian I ever heard he told the audience to be seated—that *he* would play. More screaming and shouting and yelling and hissing. But the volunteer violinist was as cool as a cucumber. He took up the instrument from the piano, made Signor Valdini sit down again, advanced to the footlights, and bowed with his hand on his heart, as if that turbulent crowd were hailing him with loudest applause. Then, with a sneer on his handsome face, he brought the fiddle to his chin, the bow stretched across the strings.

"As he played the tumult died away. There was a hush. Such playing! My heart, I have never heard the like! It was gloriously beautiful. He swayed them whatever way he would—me, also, I acknowledge it. I cried with them and I laughed with them. So did Leigh here—she couldn't help it. When he finished, they threw up their hats in the air, the ladies took the flowers from their corsages, and rained them on him. The men stamped and shouted bravos. He played over and over, until his

fingers were too tired to move the bow. Then when he would have come down among them, and departed, they caught him up on their shoulders and carried him to his hotel. It happened to be the one at which we were staying. And the man was Allan Fraser."

The ex-Senator could tell a story well. Leigh's face was flushed, her lips parted, her eyes shining when he finished.

"That is splendid!" said Hugh, carried away by this vivid description. "He must have a good heart as well as exquisite talent."

"And yet he is one of the most consummate gamblers I ever met," said Hilliard. "A gentleman, though, a perfect gentleman. Lately it seemed to me, however, that he was losing his taste for it. He began to study Italian with one or two friars at Rome, and he hasn't been the same fellow since. He'll give in—"

"A—priest?" whispered Leigh, looking at her uncle with startled eyes. "Not—a priest, Uncle Lewis?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Why not? A Roman Catholic, at any rate, and that will spoil him for me. I daresay he'll be as strait-laced as the rest of them and frown forever on games of chance—"

"Preferring to earn his living honestly," said Hugh.

"What matters it where money comes from?" asked Hilliard. He had meant Hugh when he spoke of strait-lacedness, and seeing that the words struck home, probed a little deeper.

"But if it isn't honest money," began Hugh.

"What is dishonest about money? The gambling? You stand to win or lose. If you win, it is the other fellow's loss. If you lose, it is his gain."

Hugh's blood began to warm under the insolence of his tone.

"There are certain habits—vices, rather, people acquire which must be condemned," he said, sharply. "Gambling is every whit as bad as drunkenness—and surely you would not uphold the latter? It is a passion—"

"You are too harsh!" said Leigh in a petulant tone. She had drawn away from her betrothed, and stood looking at him

with cold eyes of disapproval. "You are too harsh!" she repeated, angrily. "All men can not be models of perfection—a man with a fault is a relief—he really is. One gifted like—like uncle's friend— Surely you can not put him in the same class with lesser mortals. He should be bound by less conventions or restrictions than—than you or I."

"Do you mean to say, Leigh, that because a man can play the violin better than most men he is entitled to indulge in vices that lower his moral nature? Being so highly gifted he should be so much the more grateful to God."

She frowned almost contemptuously.

"You are too cold to understand—you have no ideality in your composition."

"Oh, yes, I have," he retorted. "Only I am not sickly in my view—my sense of right is not perverted. I see things as they should be seen."

"And call a spade a spade," she said, almost sneeringly. "Oh, you wise creatures, who are so honest and above board, and condemn the human nature you will never understand!"

Even Mildred gazed at her in amazement—her tones were so full of feeling. As for Hugh, something pierced his heart—a shaft of pain. Were these her sentiments, hers, whom he had exalted above all women?

Mr. Hilliard laughed.

"You will discover that every rose has its thorn, my dear Hugh. Leigh knows her own mind, wants her own way—and will have the last word."

"Well, well," said Hugh kindly, "we will not quarrel, Leigh and I—over a man in Monte Carlo who is nothing to us and never will be anything." Her uncle's words showed him in what an atmosphere of self-willed indulgence the girl had been nurtured. How differently, once she had been transplanted to a more earnest life, would she think and feel! His gentle speech, after her aggressiveness, brought the softness back to her eyes. She laid her hand on his arm almost affectionately.

"See what a faulty creature, I am, dear," she whispered, as she

turned away with him. "Love me, with all my mistakes and all my wickedness. Maybe I will be a better woman yet."

Hugh smiled tenderly and drew her hand more closely to him. He wanted her to feel that he understood, and for the rest of the evening they were supremely happy. It seemed to him even earlier than usual when Mrs. Fenton stood up to make her adieu. The poor woman was bored to death—for her the evening had been all too long. Gertrude, the spirit of the house, was gloomy and distract, and so there was little liveliness in the drawing-room. For Leigh's half-veiled impertinence galled the young girl to the quick, and she had all she could do to restrain herself.

* * * * *

"Ugh! What a bore!" said Uncle Lewis on his way home that evening. "No more family parties for me, if you please. Only for that Powell girl I never could have got through the evening. Your lover is a prig, Leigh."

"Not to me," said Leigh.

Hilliard smiled in his sarcastic way.

"How long will it last, my lady?"

"Perhaps forever," she retorted. "As long as your fancy for Miss Powell, at any rate."

"Don't be too sure—she is a charming girl. In fact, my dear sister and my loving niece, let me breathe a secret into your ear—either ear, it doesn't matter which. I am tired of a roving life—a bachelor existence. If she'll have me, I'll marry Mildred Powell."

Leigh laughed spitefully.

"I see you can not look unmoved upon my—and Hugh's—felicity. But don't you think you are a little too old, a trifle too bald, and just a tiny bit too stout to suit so charming a young lady?"

The Senator winced, for vanity was not dead within him, and Leigh knew his vulnerable points.

"I may be all three," he returned. "There's no fool like an old fool, however. And despite your kind warning, my pretty

niece, I intend to persevere. Faint heart never won fair lady may be as true in my case as in another's."

* * * * *

While the ex-Senator was holding this conversation with his niece and sister, the person most concerned in it was sitting in her own room alone. Gertrude Waring's unhappiness was new, comparatively speaking, to Mildred Powell's. There is no sympathy from the world in general for those who are miserable, and Mildred had early laid this lesson to her soul. But to-night the iron had entered deep indeed. It awoke the bitter pain of that evening when first she learned of Laurence's death. Of her unhappiness when she heard of Uncle Eric's blank refusal to bring back Laurence's body, although Hugh had done his best to soften the harshness of that refusal. Of her disappointment when she received from him the letter of Banks & Belding, saying that they had kept no trace and could find no trace of Allan Fraser, who had disappeared shortly after he had returned his dead friend's letters and credentials.

And now, with her beautiful hair unbound and lying in silky profusion over her shoulders, with her violet eyes dark with emotion, her lips trembling, she sat at her secretary looking at a small picture which she had just taken from its inmost recess—a picture she had treasured for many years—and gave herself up to long-pent emotions and olden memories.

Sitting thus, with the heavy dew of tears settling on her lashes, and rolling down her face, in her softened mood the resemblance to Leigh Fenton which Gertrude had noticed was almost striking. The expression was different. She had not frittered her life away idly in idle emotions. A little self-contained now, perhaps, by reason of feelings long repressed, but still this softened face was a noble and a true one.

"Ah, Laurence, Laurence, Laurence," she murmured tenderly. "Only one you, dear heart, only one you in all the world."

How strange that after all these months the man who knew of Laurence's ending should have been brought to her notice at last. That in a flash, a single instant, the desire of her heart had

been granted. She had his address now, here in her hand. Let her consider what was best for her to do.

She thought of many plans, casting them all aside one after the other as impractical. With the eyes of memory she saw Laurence Lindsay as he had been when she, a small girl, had come to live first at the Manor. How he had patronized and petted her! Her fancy had been taken by his handsome face and courtly ways. He seemed so much above her, so much older, so much wiser. She did not recognize the fact that he was weak as water, and that she—young as she was—possessed the stability with which she credited him. It was enough for her that he came to her with all his little worries and trials and secrets. As years passed he brought his greater ones to the girl who never failed him. Even during his frequent trips from home she was the one with whom he kept up correspondence. And when the blow fell, and Uncle Eric sent him—or he went—away forever, hers was the most despairing heart in the world. She found excuses for him in her sweet compassion, and before he left the States he came to her secretly and bade her farewell.

Not a living soul knew of this except Matthew Horton, and it was with Matthew Horton's help he had accomplished it. She met him at the bridge over the Lindsay stream, and faithful Matthew kept guard when they said good-by. They were not lovers—no word of love had ever passed between them. But there was something in Laurence Lindsay's reckless nature that was held in thrall by her unswerving fidelity. That day came before her now. She had been twenty then, with a little experience of the world, and she gave him her hand in silence when he turned to greet her, and they sat in silence under the shadowy pines for a long time, talking of many things—trivial things, as people do when mighty emotions move them.

“Let us put all sentimental considerations aside,” she had said, with what coolness she could assume. “And let us talk business, dear Laurence. You are going out into the world a poor man now—you have nothing. I can not give you what I possess—that would be impossible, unless you take myself. Let us go

away, to make our fortunes together, dear friend and comrade."

He had flushed to the roots of his dark hair.

"Poor Mildred!" he said. "How you shame me! What have I done to deserve such friendship? And do you think I would make you miserable by binding your sweet life to such a wreck as mine? Never. To see, perhaps, in after years, the right man come along, and your face grow thin for love of another? You do not love me, Mildred!"

Did she not? It was trembling on her lips to say how much. Her heart leaped with the words that maiden modesty would not permit utterance. Her whole body quivered, as he continued:

"Nor do I, thank God, love you in that way, for if I did 'twould make the parting doubly bitter. I have been careless, maybe—but I am not all to blame. I love this dear old place—every inch of its ground. I could not rest in my grave buried out of Lindsay's white soil.

"I have made you cry," he continued, for the tears were flowing swiftly down her cheeks. "I am not worth a single tear. But your self-sacrifice, your friendship, shall be with me wheresoever I may go. And it is better for me—God knows a hundred times better for you—that I go alone."

He put his arms about her tenderly then, and kissed her on the lips, his own eyes heavy with tears. She broke from him, and ran up through the woods and out past Matthew like a startled deer. And she had registered a vow in the depths of her aching heart that no other's lips should ever touch hers in caress again. That she would die as she had lived, alone.

Then, after years of silence had come the news of his death—the bitter, sudden news that had almost killed her. She shuddered as with cold now when she thought of it.

What was to prevent her bringing back the body of the man she loved—to taking the matter in her own hands? With Laurence Lindsay resting in the majestic silence of death at his gates, the master of the Manor might rave and storm, but for decency's sake dare not refuse admission.

She thought this over now, and at last drew pen and paper toward her, and started a letter to Mr. Fraser.

A pathetic little note it was in its way. Though its writer strove to be thoroughly businesslike, the yearning of this unguarded moment stole into the terse lines. Would he advise her? she asked him. And then went on to tell him of Laurence Lindsay's wish, and of how, after hearing of his death, she had tried to find the Mr. Fraser who had been so good to him, but could not. And of how that very evening, ex-Senator Hilliard had mentioned his name. She had made bold to write to him—and would he answer her? For well she knew that Laurence Lindsay could not rest in alien soil, nor could she rest thinking of him so far away, for she had been his true friend and loyal comrade even in his absence.

She looked up when that letter was signed and sealed—looked up at the pictured face, and drew it toward her.

"Are you satisfied with me?" she whispered. "Laurence, my darling, are you satisfied with me?" Her tears fell heavily and slowly. She leaned her head down on the desk, and pressed her lips to the photograph. "My darling, my darling, be satisfied with me."

* * * * *

She faced the world again the next morning with serene blue eyes and mien as proud as ever. Her letter she posted with her own hands, and after that came another trial: waiting. She had no idea how long it would be before it reached him. The first week she would not think of it. But with the second came expectation, and with the third a longing that was almost feverish. And then, just as she felt that she could bear the suspense no longer, the answer arrived. It was one pleasant afternoon as she sat with Aunt Estelle and Gertrude in the former's sitting-room. Aunt Estelle, busy with her embroidery, did not notice how the girl's face changed, and how her hand shook when she saw the foreign postmark. Uncle Eric, looking up from his newspaper, inquired in a jocular manner whether it was her turn to be receiving love-letters now.

She smiled, and made some evasive reply, slipping the note, meanwhile, into her bosom. Then, in order to distract the attention of the others, she went about her self-imposed duties as usual. She poured the tea, waited on her aunt, practised a song or two with Gertrude. Only now and then her hand stole to the front of her dress, in order to assure herself that the precious missive was a reality, not a dream.

He wrote a peculiar, cramped hand, she thought, when she first unfolded the thin sheet in the privacy of her room. And then she settled herself to decipher it.

“Some years ago, when I first met Laurence Lindsay,” began the letter, “he told me of Miss Mildred Powell. . He told me of her strength of character, her fidelity. Pardon me if I laughed at him—for I did not believe in either of these traits as characteristic of woman. I see that I have been unfortunate.

“Well did Laurence love his country and his home. It brings the past vividly before me when you ask me to help you to fulfil his wish to be buried in his native soil.

“But there are many difficulties in the way. I would be obliged to go to Costa Rica—to the inhospitable regions in which my poor friend lies—in order to be sure that it was really his body that came back. I am not prepared for this journey yet.

“I would take it more quickly if I were sure that his uncle would consent that he be buried in the Lindsay vault. It would hardly be wise to try so great an undertaking without his approval.

“Through Laurence I know that there is an old man connected with the Manor—Matthew, I think they call him—who would be willing to help and advise you. I will manage to see you within the next few weeks, perhaps, through this Matthew if I can discover him. At the present a letter addressed to ‘Hotel L’Etrangère, Paris,’ will reach me. How soon I may come to the United States I can not tell, for I am but a bird of passage anywhere.

“Why not broach the subject to Mr. Lindsay, and find out how he feels in the matter?”

"Which is just what I dare not do," she murmured. "How Laurence must have loved us to describe his home—and me—and poor old Matthew to a stranger in a faraway country! Oh, to think of him dying alone—all alone! Of Matthew—and of me, *of me!*" She sighed. "Had he stayed here, had we seen each other! Oh, he would have grown to love me, I know, I know he would. No one ever took my place in his heart."

There was a new problem facing the girl now. What was she to do? How broach the subject to Uncle Eric? How bear his reproaches, maybe his sneers, in all probability his rage? She winced. She would write again to Mr. Fraser and explain things before she did so.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MOTHER'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE happenings at Lindsay Manor were affecting one more person as deeply as any of the principal actors in the scenes. At Westport, in her little home, Mrs. Lindsay pursued her daily avocations just as serenely as usual. France had grown quite settled—the year from sixteen to seventeen does a great deal to mature the hoydenish, thoughtless, incipient future woman. She was very tender with her mother—much more tender and gentle than she had ever been—for she noticed that there was a weary droop to the kind lips, and an anxious furrow between the eyes that seldom lighted now with the glad merriment of old.

For her firstborn, probably the dearest of her children, was causing her the greatest sorrow of her life. She saw before him nothing but misery. His letters showed her how deep was his infatuation. It was not the sort of affection she had thought her Hugh would have entertained. Day by day the new love was absorbing all his thoughts, his cares, his tenderness. Day by day he was putting from him all and everything save one alone. He had given himself up to the great passion with what seemed madness to his mother. She could not really tell why she felt so badly over it—there was a strange foreboding at her heart, despite his reassuring letters, their joyous tone.

She never lost her temper with her children, and when Agatha came, rejoicing at Hugh's engagement, exalting the new sister-in-law-to-be to the skies, the mother had nothing to say except coinciding words. Then, in an unguarded moment, her daughter told her of that last interview with Gertrude before she left—told her that she had always been afraid of Hugh falling in love with

the girl—that his good-fortune was partly due to her. Who knew what might not have happened had she not roused Gertrude's pride before things went too far?

Mrs. Lindsay, listening, almost speechless, turned now. Agatha, gazing up with satisfied complacency, read something in the flushed face, the flashing eyes of her mother she had never seen in them. For the first time she stood frightened before her.

“Not another word!” said Mrs. Lindsay. “Not another word! I am glad at last to learn how well I have succeeded in rearing my children. That you, my daughter, could have wounded the heart of that most loving child in such a bitter manner! That child, for whose welfare I have prayed night after night, scarce daring to ask of God the great boon that she might love my son! Now I hold the key to her pathetic little letters—in which her aching heart tried to mask its pain under smooth-sounding words. And my son Hugh, my darling, whose prayers were learned at my very knee—forgetful of his pride, forgetful of his religion, he takes this woman—who will humble him first in his own eyes, and be the cause probably of the loss of his immortal soul! Go home, Agatha, go home, and when you reach there, go down on your two knees, and ask God to give you the childlike faith, the loving heart, of the little girl you despise. Would God she were indeed to be my daughter! Gladly would I welcome her, and her place would not be lower with me than any one of you.”

She left the room then, and Agatha, astonished, sat silent for a long time. She had never seen her mother so moved in all her life. And she was scared as well at the storm she had raised. She went away indeed, not angry—but frightened. And that night when her husband came home she told him, with tears, of the occurrence. He was a sensible young fellow on the whole, and he comforted her, telling her that they would go together and ask her mother's forgiveness.

So it happened that Agatha—a very humble Agatha indeed!—crept into her mother's loving arms, and with penitence asked her not to remember that she had wounded her.

And perhaps, in that hour, the mother and daughter got closer

together, and Agatha realized in very truth the sublimity of her mother's soul.

For Leigh had written—and Mrs. Lindsay took out the beautiful letter, each character so carefully formed. She read the high-sounding phrases that, analyzed, meant so little. And she placed Gertrude's scrawl beside it, and she showed Agatha how the one note was missing from that high-flown epistle—the note of sincerity. In Gertrude's every line was simple affection and honesty—one felt she said not half that her heart dictated.

And Agatha saw with her mother's eyes, and learned the value of things material in contrast with those immortal.

"Oh, mother," she said, "when shall I be as wise as you are?"

And the mother answered, smiling sorrowfully:

"When your children are as old as mine."

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And, indeed, as those weeks sped by, it was well for the good mother that she knew not the truth of the conditions existing at the Manor. Already had the mocking words of ex-Senator Hilliard begun to be verified. Leigh was discontented. That first high mood in which she had resolved to give up all things for Hugh Lindsay wore away. Her manner toward him underwent many changes. She was as contradictory as an April day—one moment all sunshine, the next a storm-cloud. So great was his love that her first sweet words were enough to remove all disagreeable impressions. It was natural for her to feel so, he told himself. She was so wonderful—she had been so completely a law unto herself, what surprising in the fact that she often took to heart the thought of a husband's absolute power? By his gentleness and kindness he would show her that apart from being his sweetheart she was also his beloved comrade and friend.

Eric Lindsay was satisfied, and his wife expressed her contentment also, willing, even anxious, to agree with him in everything. Gertrude, bravely fighting out the sorrow of her life, and resisting Aunt Estelle, who was bringing all her influence to bear in order to arrange a marriage between the girl and young Bayard Cameron, found herself in deep waters. She had grown very gentle

and tender in her intercourse with those who constituted her family, but in a case of this kind, Aunt Estelle was to learn that the stubborn will of old remained. Leigh's almost constant presence did much to teach our little heroine self-control, for the beauty was not above a word now and then to make the younger girl writhe secretly. She had not much for her pains, however, and in crossing swords with so skilled an antagonist in the use of repartee she got the worst of it. They were quiet skirmishes on the whole, for Leigh had no wish to pose as a jealous sweetheart, nor Gertrude as a love-sick, disappointed girl. Hugh was perfectly dense to Leigh's innuendoes that Gertrude cared for him, and she had enough womanliness left not to say what she meant outright. To him each passing day made Leigh more precious.

"You have no idea," she said once, "how hard it is to contemplate the future. I wish you would get angry at me, Hugh, some time, and give me a thorough scolding— But no, do not, or I shall be more unhappy still. You men, when you marry, absorb but one element into your lives. We women change our whole existence."

Reared by one woman whose every careful word had been a true one, whose every feeling was pure and noble, Hugh's ideal was a rare and radiant creature who could think no wrong. In Leigh he felt that he had found her. It was well that she contemplated the future with such troubled eyes. She was no hare-brained, careless character, not she. The cynical phrases that so often passed her lips were no indication of her true nature, he assured himself—merely bubbles that rose to the surface, echoes of the artificial life she had led, the artificial coin of an artificial world. She would forget them when she entered the country of truth and simplicity—his native air, his mother's native air.

He had to return to the city the last of November, and he had hoped that Leigh would promise to marry him at Christmas, so that he could spend the next month fitting up their new home, with his mother's help—for she must be content with the home his own loving hands would make for her. Leigh rebelled at such

a speedy marriage. No; that wasn't half enough time—she wanted longer to get used to the idea. Even April was too soon—but she would consider it then. April—it was not long to wait—four months more than he had counted on.

His mother wrote just then—a very gentle letter, and in it she asked him to bring Leigh and Mrs. Fenton for a week's stay at the little house in Westport. And Leigh, with a sweet look in her eyes, consented willingly.

"And while you're there I'll take a run to the office and drop in on my partner," said Hugh, with a practicalness that made the girl feel suddenly that she hated him. "I've earned this vacation honestly, but perhaps he'd like a little help for a few days. Besides, I want you and mother to get to know each other—you will succeed in doing so better if I am not there."

So it chanced that Westport, at the close of one beautiful day toward the last of October, received Mrs. Fenton and her daughter. This meeting between his mother and his betrothed had been Hugh's one wish. He had no doubt as to the consequences. If Mrs. Lindsay looked about her little home, wishing it were finer to receive Hugh's aristocratic sweetheart, she did nothing to dress it up. The girl must know them as they really were.

"She will perhaps understand my boy better when she sees the home in which he was born," said the mother, with wistful longing. "God grant her a true heart—may she be as good as she is beautiful."

In her welcome there was nothing left to be desired. She opened her arms to the girl, and Leigh, stirred out of herself by the longing in her eyes, returned her embrace with a warmth that astonished Hugh and impressed his mother favorably. She greeted the older woman no less heartily, and then took them to their rooms. The simple chamber, with its pure white curtains and sparse furniture, struck the girl, who was so used to luxury, as a relief.

"It looks so cool," she said, smiling. "And it will be such a change. I did not bring my maid," she went on. "I wanted

to do things for myself for a week to see what it is like. I never did without a maid more than a day at a time before this."

She was standing at the mirror, taking off her hat as she spoke. The mother noticed how beautiful she was, how altogether patrician, and how altogether out of place in this small room. But she would allow herself no such thoughts as this last.

"Let me be your maid," she said, smiling. "Remember I am Hugh's mother, and anything I can do for you will be a pleasure indeed."

Hugh went to the city next day, leaving Leigh to his mother and sisters, and at first Leigh did enjoy the change. Everything was so very different that the novelty of it attracted her—for the first two days. At the end of that time she made up her mind that life in such a place as this was circumscribed and narrow and miserable. They were so dreadfully punctual and so conscientious.

When one is ruled by self-admiration there is no self-examination.

Unwillingly Leigh had to confess that Hugh's mother was more ladylike than her own, despite her comparatively humble surroundings. And realizing this she tried to be as clever as she possibly could. No one knew better than she how to turn high-sounding phrases, to say much and to mean little. She exerted herself to display the talents that had won her a reputation.

Experience of life had made Mrs. Lindsay forbearing toward all humankind. When the young girl spoke to her on so many themes, and with such brilliant speech, she looked at her with clear-eyed wisdom, and then, in a few simple words, laid bare the fallacy of her ideas, or showed her how much more she knew of the subject than Leigh herself. Nor did she do this in a patronizing way, but gently, as if she had been Agatha or France.

"Three days more of it!" said Leigh to her mother Wednesday morning. "Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, we have been here three centuries. Oh, I shall be so old when I get home again!"

"It isn't bad here," said Mrs. Fenton, who, in her way, enjoyed anything that left her in peace. "And Mrs. Lindsay is an excellent cook."

It was the worst thing she could have said. Leigh made a wry face.

"I suppose I, too, will be expected to be cook, and everything else," she said, hotly. "What of the Leigh Fenton I have known—she of superior longings and attainments—"

"You'd lose those very soon if you hadn't enough to eat," said Mrs. Fenton, placidly. Now that her daughter was engaged she saw no reason to be so considerate of her. Besides there was no danger in the prospects that Leigh viewed so gloomily—for had she not Eric Lindsay's word on it?

They stayed the week. The day before they left for home Leigh was sitting beside Mrs. Lindsay on the porch. France was busy in the house, and her merry voice could be heard in a snatch of song as she went from room to room. Leigh listened in silence a long time, unconscious that Mrs. Lindsay's eyes were on her face. At last she patted a yawn and threw the novel she had been trying to read on the step.

"How can that girl sing so?" she asked, turning to the mother. "What a sober life you live out here—and how practical!"

"An earnest, quiet, happy life it is to us, my child," she returned, gravely.

"I couldn't lead it," her teeth shutting together with a snap.

"No? Tell me, dear, what sort of life you would like. A different one to ours?"

"Different? Oh, heavens!" The girl smiled at the absurdity of the question. "I would not, I could not, live a dull life in a dull house. I must have excitement, emotion, poetry, beauty."

"There is no life on God's earth without its poetry and beauty, Leigh."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"And just as much as we put into it just so much does it contain. We can idealize even our daily occupations."

"Such occupations as yours—mending, darning—" The girl shuddered.

"With love and duty as the spirit of your daily existence—there is beauty even in these."

"Ah, well, we won't discuss it," said Leigh, slowly. She must get away from this quickly—she would stifle here. "Perhaps I expect too much," she went on. "I have always wanted to be best in everything. Nothing but what was perfect ever suited me. I dreamed that when the time came my love would come to me with such idolization as the poets write of. The love that makes kings lay down their crowns for the sake of a poor girl." Her eyes glowed. "A love that would carry a man out of himself—a wild tempest of affection that would stop at nothing. Oh, somewhere there is love like this in the world."

The mother looked at her as if she had suddenly gone mad.

"And for this great, all-absorbing, passionate devotion, what have you to offer?"

The question was an honest one. For the first time in her life, perhaps, the girl gave an honest question an honest, if unexpected, answer.

"Only this," she said, touching her face with her hand.

"Only that!" sorrowfully. "What a poor exchange for a man's whole heart."

"I love Hugh," said the girl, casting down her eyes. "He makes me ashamed of myself often. Hugh understands me," almost defiantly. "He knows I am not like other people."

"You are romantic, Leigh, and life is an earnest thing after all—from which we can expect to reap only what harvest grows from the seed we plant. Dreams do not help us to lead aimful lives."

"What are dreams to you are the breath of life to me," sharply.

So this was Hugh's sweetheart, thought the mother—this was her home-loving, quiet boy's future wife, this girl whose head was filled with silly nonsense, with fantastic notions. And Hugh saw none of these faults. She was his idol. Afterward how would it be with him? Afterward—

He was not one to yield the truth of his heart and soul to any one woman's views. But if he really loved her would she not in-

fluence him, would she not lead him to her way of thinking as his father had been led by her? Slowly, maybe, but surely, he would turn aside from his simple faith, from his holy religion—for the sake of her who believed in nothing. Oh, that she might speak to this girl with the tongue of an angel, would that she could show her the reality of life as she had found it! With a sigh she laid her hand over the beautiful white ones.

"My child," she said, tenderly, "I want you to listen to me. My views are not yours, for I am old and I have seen many things come to pass. Above all the idle fancies that weave their way into our lives, there is but one thing necessary—the will to do right. God is our supreme Creator, and a woman is at her best and loveliest when bowing to His decree. The passionate love you describe is not the true love God wishes us to have—for He must come first in our hearts—first and foremost. Does He come first in yours, Leigh—even before Hugh?"

"I am not much interested in religion," said Leigh, indifferently. "Hugh has said he will show me how you Catholics believe some day. If I can see it—but pshaw!" She shrugged her shoulders gracefully and yawned again. She had recovered her artificial manner and was anxious to change the subject. With an aching heart Mrs. Lindsay spoke of other things. And that day ended and Leigh went home.

"Thank God," she said, when she found herself in the train, leaving Westport. "Thank God. I should die if I had one more week of it. I must love Hugh very much to be able to stand his family. And now comes Aunt Estelle. I detest that woman. At least, Hugh's mother is a lady!"

"Leigh!" warned Mrs. Fenton. "Do be careful!"

"Why?" she asked.

"You are making a good marriage. Hugh is a splendid fellow."

"Well?" cried the girl impatiently. "I bring wealth, my freedom, my youth, my beauty, one of the best of names! And you, you, *you*, my own *mother*, think I should be grateful for his marrying me?"

"My dear, I fully realize that you are a girl above the ordinary by far. But remember, also, what a man Hugh is. Many will envy you."

Leigh was silent.

"I don't know what to make of you," said the mother, despairingly. "I can safely say I do not understand my own child!"

Leigh laughed.

"Did you ever flatter yourself that you did? Your nature is content with small things—it knows neither doubt nor struggle. You think I should be satisfied because Hugh is good."

"You have no idea of the value of that goodness to your future," said Mrs. Fenton. She thought of her own married life. Wedded to an unsympathetic husband, almost against her will, neglected and slighted and despised.

"Goodness! Faith! Belief in God! What a bugaboo to frighten a child from wrongdoing. You have begun too late to preach. And because Hugh is clever and true and honest I should kneel before him, worship him! I tell you, mother, I expected much more in my husband."

"Much more? Great heavens, what?" gasped Mrs. Fenton, almost in dismay.

"What you and father deprived me of—the love I dreamed of," she returned, bitterly. "The day that I gave Hugh my promise, when I looked into his eyes, I fancied the same love for me transformed him, as once was mine. I was mistaken. He is a cold-blooded sobersides whom I shall hate in six months!"

"Leigh!" cried her mother. "What are you saying? Of whom do you speak?"

"Whom? Oh, how well you know! I swore never to mention his name in your presence. But I tell you that you have wrecked my life—wrecked my future—"

"A miserable gambler, an itinerant musician!" said the mother, roused at last. "A pleasant person to win the affections of Leigh Fenton! Yes; and so you would have married Allan Fraser, would you? And been unhappy ever after. A nice pair of vagabonds you would have made—penniless and destitute.

Perhaps you could have helped to earn your mutual livelihood when times were bad!"

"I should have been glad even to do that," said the girl, in a strange voice. "When one really loves nothing is hard or—"

"I refuse to discuss this question any further," said Mrs. Fenton, sharply. "You are engaged to Hugh Lindsay, and you will marry him. That settles it."

Only great fear could have induced the mother to speak in such a tone to her imperious girl. She was thoroughly frightened at the bare possibility of this marriage falling through. It was a consequence she refused to contemplate.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HIDDEN PICTURE.

THE following week found a gay party gathered under the Lindsay roof-tree. There were Bayard Cameron and his handsome brother, Roger; a rather lackadaisical young fellow named Jerome Beardsley (whose chief motive in life seemed to be to pay attention to Hugh's sweetheart); the last-named young lady and her mother, and ex-Senator Hilliard. One would scarcely recognize the place in the transformation that this merry crowd effected in it. Hugh had met his betrothed in New York, and seen her safely en route for home, but with such a preoccupied, grave face that it made the girl feel she was not so absolutely first with him as she anticipated being. He told her he did not expect to get away for another week, and then that he could only have a fortnight with her before his final return. His somewhat cool behavior satisfied Leigh just then, whose excitable nerves, after her mother's speech, were in an upset condition. By the time Hugh got back to Lindsay she was ready to welcome him with the ardor she had felt during the first week of their engagement.

All unpleasant thoughts left the young man when he alighted from the train at Kentboro and saw Leigh waiting for him in the dog-cart, having taken the long drive alone. He looked at her with loving eyes as she made room for him beside her and gathered up the reins in her dainty hands.

They said very little on the way home. Leigh, now that she saw him again, felt positively indifferent, and Hugh was too happy for much speech. As they passed along the wooded roads and came out in full view of the Manor, with its gray gables and

wonderful air of stability and oldness, Leigh involuntarily reined in the horse and sat looking at it.

"How beautiful it is!" she said, softly. Hugh, too, was gazing at the home of his fathers. His heart stirred a little at the admiration in her tones. He put his hand over her two gloved ones.

"I have learned to love it dearly, very dearly," he said. "I am proud of this beautiful place, Leigh—prouder than I ever thought I could be. It is the Lindsay feeling, I suppose."

She nodded assent.

"I suppose so." She continued to look at the house with appreciative eyes. "And it is to be our home, Hugh."

"Some time," he answered. "It is not because it is to be my future home that I love it, Leigh, but because there have been so many Lindsays who stand as you and I do to-day, admiring it."

She did not enter into his mood, but touched the little pony lightly with her whip and they started off.

"We won't have to stay here, anyhow," she said. "We can come back to it—of course. But don't stay here."

He was struck by the note in her voice.

"And why not?"

"Oh, Hugh, could you be satisfied to live year in and year out in this—wilderness? We shall travel of course, you and I. There is such a beautiful world far away beyond this, such a beautiful old world. There are Rome and Venice and Naples, and Berlin and Paris and London! We shall travel so much, and come back to rest ourselves at Lindsay Manor. I have a mania for traveling. I could never be satisfied long in one place."

"And yet, Leigh," he said, quickly, "if it is so decreed that Lindsay Manor is to be mine—God keep that day far distant—our main interests will center right here in this place. And as for the first years of our married life—A little house in the suburbs of the city, with one serving-maid is all I have to give you, as I have told you often. I know it is a great sacrifice for you to make, Leigh," he said, humbly. "But it will not last long. My pictures will be famous, and with you beside me to incite me

to great things, I shall do wonderful work. It is in me—I feel it, I know it."

"Smaller than Lindsay Manor," she said, musingly. "As small as—as your home in Westport? It will be queer, Hugh. I can scarcely imagine it. I am afraid, almost."

"When I am with you," he said, "the earth is transfigured. A hut in the mountains with you would be sweeter than a king's palace without you."

Her heart was stirred again. How true he was, how honest! Surely, surely, she could in time grow to care for him.

"Do not doubt me, Hugh," she said, more earnestly than she knew.

"Doubt you? If I doubted you, then would I be poor indeed and miserable. I am all joy, all delight, all thanksgiving, that the sweetest, and truest, and purest girl in the world will be my wife."

"Joy, delight, thanksgiving!" She shook her head. "Don't you take any *real* views of life at all, Hugh? I have grown wise since I went to Westport. Where is the joy, the delight, the thanksgiving in real life?"

"Where, Leigh? Why, all around us. You are the epitome of all three. Ah, dear, you shouldn't say such gloomy things. They fit but ill upon your lips."

"Do they? My life has not been all of roses!"

"Ah, but now it shall be," he said, tenderly. "Now it shall be, my sweetheart. I will banish all disagreeable things from it. Leigh, you will try to be happy with me, won't you?"

"Yes," she answered, softly. "Yes, Hugh, I will."

* * * * *

"Hugh, my lad," said Uncle Eric to him later in the day. "I wish you'd drop a line to Banks & Belding for me. I haven't made that change in my will yet, and it is beginning to prey on me. Not that it really makes much matter—the will is made out in favor of my eldest nephew—but for fear of complications, for fear of complications, as Banks would say."

"Poor Laurence!" said Hugh.

"Poor Laurence!" echoed Uncle Eric, but not quite in the same tone. "It hasn't been changed since his time—somehow I always felt that Harry would disappoint me. Banks made a few complimentary remarks when he drew it up for me—I always had a suspicion since that the man thinks I am slightly insane. But we won't bother—it will be fixed all right now." Uncle Eric laid his hand affectionately on his nephew's arm. "Somehow, Hugh, I shall be gladder to leave the Manor to your care than to any one's. I really loved—Laurence," he hesitated a little over the name, "but he was too much for me. And Harry—well, I'll let the dead rest. I'm a bitter old chap, Hugh, but you've taught me that much. You won't begrudge your uncle a corner in your heart after he's gone, will you, boy?"

"Uncle Eric!" Hugh caught the hand resting on his arm in a gentle pressure. "Do not talk of such a gloomy thing. And I never thought to care for you half so much as I do to-day. When I think of Lindsay, even though it was here that I met my greatest happiness, you are first with me—and when I come here it is for your sake—to see you."

"I believe you," said Uncle Eric, slowly. "It is a great thing to have faith in human nature, my boy, a great thing. I lost it for some years, but you have brought it back again. Only for you I might never have known how great a thing it is."

They were interrupted by Leigh and Mildred, who entered the room now, the beauty with a look of discontent on her fair features. Leigh had been very unsatisfactory this last week, and Hugh had had the chance to see her daily, in companionship with people whom she heartily despised. This itself set the girl at a disadvantage. She became moody and abstracted. More than once she led the conversation to Monte Carlo, to Nice, to Paris—and to Fraser, the handsome violinist, though she never mentioned his name. At first the ex-Senator was very willing to speak of him, but after a quiet interview with his sister he found means to adroitly evade the subject. This angered her still more, for she knew her mother was at the bottom of it. And Hugh found her cold and cutting; or tender and gentle; or so silent that she

sat hours without opening her lips; or so gay and volatile as to cause comment.

She, too, seeing her lover every day, was having longer and longer moments of disappointment. His quietness palled on her—for her nature craved excitement. The breaking of hearts had been with her a pastime. Hugh was an uncommon lover. It was new to be taken possession of as he had taken possession of her; to be told her faults as he had told her of them; to cross swords in diverse opinions. But even these resources failed her now, for his love was mingled with a tender pity that would not permit him to quarrel—a sorrowful pity. She was no longer the fair, sweet goddess he had revered, but a passionate, faulty girl—and even her wonderful beauty could not blind him to this fact. It seemed to him that he was constantly breaking off conversations and breaking into others to avoid an open breach. He thought all this due, however, to her home influence. She made such fine speeches, but her deeds did not correspond with them. He did not know that when love begins to analyze it has lost its sweetest characteristic—blindness.

She had been very daring in her remarks this evening, and Hugh sat listening to her with grave face, in silence. He knew well that she was aware her words were offending Aunt Estelle, whose code of propriety was very rigid. At last that good woman could stand it no longer. Leigh had been telling of an ovation that had been accorded a matinee idol, in which she and three other young ladies took part.

“I wasn’t interested in the least,” she finished, languidly, “but it was quite popular just then to be in love with some one of the theatrical heroes—and I couldn’t be out of the fashion.”

Jerome Beardsley made some inane remark. He was very much smitten with the girl and showed it, despite the fact that Hugh’s diamond glistened on her third finger.

“I should think a young woman who so far forgets herself, whether it is the style or not, is very careless,” said Aunt Estelle. After all, her husband was a Lindsay—she had the privilege of expressing what was in her mind, at least.

Leigh smiled in the insolent way that Aunt Estelle had learned to hate.

"I am speaking of the greater world. You must remember this is only a small portion of it—this State of South Carolina—even though it does contain Lindsay Manor."

The words were bad enough—but the tone!

"Out in the world there is a wider horizon—one is not bound by so many distressing restrictions," she pursued.

Mrs. Fenton looked up from the book of photographs lying on the table before her. She saw Aunt Estelle's flushed and angry face, and the deep scowl between Eric Lindsay's brows—a scowl which had come there very often during this last few days. Gertrude turned to Hugh with a laughing remark, and at her request he went with her to the piano. Leigh's eyes, hard and cold, followed the two figures, her lips curving into the scornful, superior smile she always assumed when she looked at Gertrude. Her fair head rested on the soft velvet of the chair, one hand depended carelessly over its broad arm, her whole slender figure was the incarnation of insolent grace. Gertrude, turning, caught that look and that smile, and though they stung her to the quick, she answered them with a steady stare. Then she called to Mildred to play. Once Mildred sat down on the stool, Hugh made his way to his sweetheart's side.

"Are you coming to congratulate me on my new mentor?" she asked, languidly.

"As one calls to the echo so it answers," he returned, more coldly than he was aware of. "My aunt is an unworldly woman, Leigh—and she is older than you. For your own mother's sake you should not speak so to her."

"You are what they call a model young man, I believe," she answered. "I have heard that many times recently. I can only wonder what you saw in me when—let us say, Gertrude, was around? Why did you not ask her to marry you, Hugh? She would so have suited—your mother!"

He hesitated a moment, then his eyes took on the steely glitter she knew so well.

"You will not speak in that manner—or in that tone to me, Leigh."

"No? I am unused to obedience."

"Therefore I would not command, but request," he returned, more quietly. "And my little sweetheart will do as I desire."

She did not answer. He always made her feel ashamed of herself, as she had told his mother, and this was one of the instances. She rested her head on her hand, listening. Bayard Cameron had followed where Gertrude led, as usual, and had taken Mildred's place at the piano. His playing was entirely different to the girl's somewhat colorless but faultless execution. Leigh forgot her anger and vexation. Her face kindled.

"That sonata! I know it so well, Hugh! Listen—did you ever hear anything more divine? Oh, Hugh, I love it, I love it!"

He smiled at her almost childish enthusiasm, at the light on her face, the eagerness of her whole erect body. Then Uncle Eric's voice, harsh and cold, came from behind them.

"Mr. Cameron, you will oblige me by not continuing that thing," he said.

Leigh's expression was one of complete astonishment as she turned to look at the old man, who was scowling heavily. Then she sank back into her chair again, with curling lip. Bayard Cameron, scarcely believing his ears, lifted his hands from the keys.

"Laurence used to play it," whispered Gertrude. "Run into something else—anything, but not that."

"Laurence! Who is Laurence?" asked Leigh. She had caught the whispered word and addressed this query to Uncle Eric, who had to pass her on his way to the group at the piano.

"My nephew, who is dead," said Uncle Eric, grimly. Even she could read the antagonism in his face and was silent. But when, later on, Hugh's uncle and Mrs. Fenton, with Aunt Estelle and the ex-Senator, sat down to a game of bridge, Leigh turned eagerly to the younger members of the household. They had gathered about her—she generally attracted the interest of every one in the room.

"Come, tell me, who is Laurence?" she began, winningly.

"Laurence Lindsay—Uncle Eric's eldest nephew—my Uncle Gerald's son," explained Hugh. "A black sheep, poor fellow."

"A black sheep in this virtuous family! How singular!" said Leigh. She was revenging herself for Hugh's too masterful remark earlier in the evening.

Gertrude's little pale face bent forward now, and her soft brown eyes met those of the beauty with a hard light in their gentle depths.

"Didn't Harry Lindsay ever tell you of his brother Laurence, Miss Fenton?" she queried, innocently.

"No," said Leigh. She bit her lip then as if vexed at herself. "No; he never told me."

"Did you know Harry Lindsay?" asked Hugh in astonishment.

"We had two black sheep," said Gertrude, drawing back again with careless air. "The second one need not be utterly condemned."

"That is too bitter a term to apply to Laurence," said Mildred Powell now, in a low tone. She did not look at Miss Fenton and no one noticed the confusion of the latter's face, and the deep breath of relief she gave when Gertrude sat back again in her chair. "He was brought up in the wrong way—he was never permitted to think for himself. When he went out among other people he became reckless. If he did wrong—he paid."

Hugh gave Mildred a kind glance.

"You tell Leigh his story," he said. "I, indeed, have no right to speak, for I never knew him."

"And I shall listen—with interest, I assure you," returned Leigh, in a friendly manner. "He must have been an uncommon fellow, a wonderful fellow, to dare do original things here. Where all is sameness, monotony, misery."

But the words could not hurt Hugh. He had recovered from his momentary annoyance, and he smiled as he would have done at the prattling of a child. He refused to take her seriously, knowing her fondness for such enigmatical phrases. That he

was included in the sameness and monotony and misery he did not doubt—just now. But in ten minutes she would think differently. Then Mildred, in a low voice, for fear of disturbing Uncle Eric, began to speak of Laurence. Hugh, listening, knew what emotion it was gave the thrill to those smooth tones. She drew the flattering portrait of a handsome, talented, clever fellow, who had failed, but not altogether through his own fault. She exalted him. She made him out a hero, courageous in his daring, brave to folly, tender as a woman. Leigh listened with bated breath, her eyes shining—Hugh with pity at his heart.

“Show me his portrait—surely you have his portrait?” said Leigh, when Mildred finished her narration. “Oh, I should so love to see it, to have it—”

Mildred sat very quietly, her thoughts flying up to her own room, to her desk, to the pictured face hidden in its inmost recess. It came before her, with the smiling lips, the laughing eyes, that she loved.

“You can not see a picture of him,” she said. “Uncle Eric had them all destroyed after—he went away. Uncle Eric is very bitter when he once turns against a person.”

“No picture?” said Leigh in a disappointed tone. “Oh, come.” She was too well versed in woman’s ways not to have read Mildred’s secret in her warm voice, her almost tender face. This woman was an iceberg because of a buried romance, then. And she did not believe she had no picture of her lover.

“There is one portrait of him—a portrait hidden in the gallery. It has never been taken out since—we got the news of his—death,” she went on, hesitatingly. “Perhaps that is why you did not see it. If you care to look at it to-morrow it is in the alcove at the east end, and I will show you gladly.”

“A hidden picture! How too romantic!” said Leigh—then added almost petulantly: “I wish it were morning—it is so long to wait.”

* * * * *

She went to the gallery with Mildred the next day, her interest in the young man whose story she had heard having lasted over-

night. Of all the spots in Lindsay that Leigh liked, this spot especially was her favorite. It had done much to reconcile her to her engagement when she thought that she, too, would find her portrait at the end of this line—for it was a royal line indeed, and there were faces beautiful as her own among the patrician countenances hung upon these walls.

“No picture here resembles your hero,” she said. “Which is Laurence?”

“He is not here—I told you we had hidden him,” answered Mildred. “We do not even forgive the dead. He has offended us—we banish him. The only reason his portrait was not destroyed was because a famous artist painted it.”

“Are you there, Mildred?” called Aunt Estelle from the doorway. “You can come back to Leigh immediately. Julie has just finished my new lace fichu, and I don’t like it at all. Come, and show her how to arrange it properly.”

“You will find the portrait here, in the alcove. It is not heavy—take it out yourself and look at it,” said Mildred, hastily. “Aunt Estelle won’t keep me long—I’ll hurry.”

“No need,” said Leigh, graciously. Whether there was need or not Mildred could not have hurried, for Aunt Estelle was in one of her most whimsical moods and kept her fully a half-hour. When the fichu was finally arranged and draped to suit her, Mildred thought of Miss Fenton—whose presence in the picture gallery had totally escaped her memory. She glanced in on her way downstairs to see if, by any chance, the girl still remained there. What was her surprise to notice that she was standing absolutely motionless before the picture in the gold frame. Her arms were folded tightly across her breast. Mildred, approaching her with an apology on her lips, broke off quickly.

“What is the matter?” she asked. “You are dreadfully pale.”

“Am I?” Leigh unlocked her arms almost painfully and pushed the hair from her forehead. “No—I think you imagine it—the light, perhaps. And this is the famous Laurence!” she said, as if continuing a conversation. “Does it resemble him?”

“Resemble him!” echoed Mildred, dreamily. “So much so that standing here I can scarcely believe those lips can not move with the speech they were meant to frame. Sometimes I think—But I am foolish.”

“The eyes,” said Leigh, in a strange voice. “What eyes they are!”

“Beautiful—even more beautiful in reality. But let us go downstairs. Uncle Eric might not like it—he is so queer.”

Leigh turned from the picture, it seemed to Mildred, almost reluctantly, and walked with her slowly down the long room. Suddenly she paused in front of a cavalier in sweeping, plumed hat.

“Wasn’t he a musician?”

“Who? William Lindsay? I don’t know. I think—”

“I mean Laurence,” said Leigh, impatiently.

“Yes—he loved music.”

“What is this—still discussing the unfortunate Laurence?” called a cheery voice from the hall without, and Hugh waited for them, smiling. “Why, Leigh, I should be jealous, only that it would be absurd to be jealous of the dead. What did you think of the picture?”

“It is wonderful.” There was a strange expression on her face, and she shrank from Hugh as he approached her. “Oh, how could any one dislike him?” she asked, almost tenderly.

“He was his own worst enemy,” said Hugh. “Under different conditions—But how white you are, Leigh—are you tired?”

“White? Tired? No. Let us go out of doors, though, if you will—perhaps I have been too long with Laurence Lindsay’s picture—and ghosts are frightening.”

Mildred stood looking after them. Then she shook her head.

“Poor Hugh!” she murmured.

CHAPTER XVI.

"HEIMWEH."

As they walked through the great hall out on to the terrace they came face to face with Aunt Estelle. Leigh's hand dropped from Hugh's arm as his aunt approached them, and she turned away with an indifferent air.

"I'm afraid I can't stand much of her this morning," she said in a low voice. "I will go to the chestnut walk. You can follow me there if you care to, or have the time."

Hugh understood at once that she preferred being alone. It did not bother him that she should feel so, for in his own home they respected each other's privacy as sacred, and would as soon have intruded on a stranger as on one another. As for Aunt Estelle, when she saw Leigh Fenton move quickly away from the young man and turn down the side path, her face, which had been anxious and worried, cleared at once.

"Oh, Hugh," she said, confidentially. "I am so very glad Miss Fenton has gone away—for I want to speak to you on a family matter."

"What is it?" asked Hugh, gently. He might have reminded her that family matters were Leigh's concern now—but he did not. He always tried to imagine that he was talking to his mother when Aunt Estelle addressed him, but sometimes he had to stretch his imagination very far.

"It is about Eric," she said. "When he got up this morning I really thought he was going to have a spasm or convulsion or something. He turned blue and his eyes rolled. I was awfully frightened, Hugh. He got angry at me when I

asked to send for a doctor—but I can't let it go on. I must tell some one."

"Of course, Aunt Estelle. Is he sick now?"

"Oh, no—he was well enough to come down to breakfast. No one noticed that there was anything the matter. But nothing like this ever happened to him before, and I don't know what to do."

"Leave it to me, aunt—he won't be angry that you told me. He must not neglect himself. It probably was a slight congestion that can be easily cured if he submits to treatment. Don't worry above all things, and don't let him see that it disturbs you."

"You are such a comfort, Hugh," she said, looking at him affectionately.

"Thank you, aunt," he returned. He was glad, then, he had been gentle and forbearing.

At luncheon Hugh observed his uncle more closely than usual. He saw, for the first time, that signs of age were visible—that the stout form was a little bent, and that he looked careworn and tired. But his manner was just the same as ever, and he gave no indication of weakness.

"I hear Matthew Horton has a visitor," he announced. "Senator Hilliard and I were coming through the southern park when we met John Phillips, and he told us. It must be rather inconvenient for the poor old chap—he's been on the sick list two or three days. Poor Matthew! We are breaking down together."

The words had double significance to his wife and to his nephew. Gertrude glanced at him with an affectionate smile. She had known for some time that Uncle Eric had been suffering, and she had helped to further his earnest desire that it be kept from the other members of his family—at least until the visitors were gone.

"You'll get well together, Uncle Eric," she said, in a low voice.

"I hope so," he returned, in the same tone. Aloud, he addressed Hugh.

"I wish you'd go over to Matthew's this afternoon, Hugh,

and do you, Estelle, send him some wine and jelly. And in order not to let him know that you called principally to find out how he was, ask him if that man Scantley has done anything about the pine land of which we spoke last week."

Hugh acquiesced in silence. Mildred had glanced around the table quickly when her uncle announced that Matthew had a visitor. Was it Fraser at last? Her lips grew cold, and she felt as if she were about to faint. She was glad no one spoke to her. Now she could explain to him in person—now all difficulties in the path of her cherished plan were smoothed away.

"Who can it be?" asked Mrs. Lindsay, curiously. "I didn't know Matthew had any friends—he lives the life of a hermit."

"I tell you just what I heard," said Uncle Eric.

"Some uninteresting relative," interposed Leigh. "That kind of people really do have relatives, I presume."

No one paid any attention to her remark, and for some time longer the important questions of Matthew's illness and the identity of his visitor were discussed. Indeed, Gertrude, who was but human, noticing how tired Leigh Fenton seemed of the subject, dilated on it with conjectures and suppositions that drew out the topic all during lunch hour. At last Hugh rose with the expressed intention of fulfilling his uncle's wish at once. He turned to Leigh with a pleasant smile.

"Will you come?" he asked. "It is a delightful walk, and not far at that."

"Thank you, no," said Leigh. "I have had quite enough of old Matthew, as you call him. Besides, I must see Uncle Lewis—I am particularly anxious to have a five minute conversation with him alone. Will you come out with me, uncle, while Hugh departs on his errand of mercy?"

* * * * *

In the little home that had been Matthew Horton's for over fifty years, Hugh fully expected to find the old man unable to be about. He was much surprised, then, when the niece who had kept house for him since the death of his wife ten years before informed Hugh that he would find him in the sitting-room.

"We had such a fright last evening," she said to Hugh in a confidential manner, for his pleasant interest attracted every one. "We were just going to bed when—"

"To whom are you talking, Elizabeth?" called out old Matthew, uneasily.

"To Mr. Hugh, uncle," she said, opening the door. The old man was lying on the sofa, very pale, and to Hugh, as he entered, it seemed that he was laboring under great excitement. His hands were trembling, and his eyes feverishly bright.

"Uncle Eric sent me over," said Hugh, pleasantly, "and by the way, he has heard you were not quite well. He wishes you to take the best of care of yourself for a while, until you feel all right again. And have you and Scantley come to any definite arrangement about the pine land?"

"You will find all the papers there on the desk," said Matthew, in a thin voice. "I wish you'd take them, Mr. Hugh—the thing will be off my mind then. How is the master?"

"He seemed very well to me when I left him," said Hugh, going over to the desk and taking up the neat pile of papers Matthew had indicated. "You are nervous, Matthew—what is the matter? And what was the fright you had last evening?"

"Fright? Fright? Who said I had a fright, Mr. Hugh?"

"Elizabeth was telling me—"

"Elizabeth is mistaken," said Matthew, querulously. "I have had a great joy—perhaps that is the reason I appear nervous. But no fright, no fright at all. Women are apt to exaggerate things, Mr. Hugh."

"Well, I am glad you had the joy, and that Elizabeth misunderstood," said Hugh, courteously. "It is the visit of a relative, I presume?"

"A friend, a dear, dear friend, whom I have not seen in years."

"One of your old companions!" laughed Hugh, pushing back his chair. It seemed to him that the old man's manner was almost antagonistic, and he did not wish to intrude on his personal affairs. He rose and held his hand out, but when Matthew

gave him his in return, the heat of the thin fingers made him look at him anxiously.

"You are really ill," he said. "May I not mention it at the Manor? Shall we ask the doctor to call? Perhaps, now that you have a visitor, Elizabeth can not wait on you as she might. Let Aunt Estelle send one of the servants down here to help—"

"No, no," said Matthew, almost angrily. "My visitor is no trouble and I am not sick. I shall be around as usual to-morrow. Tell Mr. Eric the old man ain't dead yet, ain't dead yet by no means." His tone was so strange that again Hugh wondered. In the hall he met Elizabeth, who had just carried a tray into the dining-room. Hugh caught sight of a gray-haired man seated at the table. He had laid his book aside to turn to the tray of food. Elizabeth went to the hall door, opened it, and followed the young man out on the porch.

"Do you think Uncle Matthew very ill?" she asked, with real solicitude in her tones.

"Feverish, perhaps," said Hugh, kindly. "He is too old now to neglect himself. If he is not better to-morrow send some one up to the Manor."

"I think a stranger has no right to pop into a house without a word," she said in an aggrieved tone. "He came so late last night, too, and the old man was so scared. He is too old to be frightened like that."

"Your uncle says he was not frightened—that he is happy—"

"Happy! Hump! Does one turn white as snow and his eyes almost start out of his head for happiness? Mr. Williams had to hold him up or he would have fallen. I don't want any such happiness!"

Hugh laughed, and went on his way to the Manor. Arrived there he gave the papers to his uncle, and told him what he had learned of Matthew's visitor—not because he felt inclined to gossip, but because he knew that Uncle Eric was deeply interested.

"Williams! Williams! I never heard that name before! And you say he frightened him? How strange! I shall call myself to-morrow, if he isn't better."

Leigh made no inquiries and Hugh volunteered no information. The difference between her words and her deeds distressed him sorely. Over music, pictures, or poetry she could talk herself and others into a romantic ecstasy. She found really wonderful words to express the noblest feelings, but to do the things she spoke of was a horse of another color. She spoke touchingly of age and the honor that should be bestowed upon it—but she found old people tiresome and had no patience with their idiosyncrasies. She spoke of children as angels loaned to earth to brighten it into heavenly seeming—but children, in her private opinion, were ugly, meddlesome little nuisances, too fond of asking questions. And if Hugh did not realize this in full he was beginning to suspect it.

At dinner Mrs. Lindsay once more started the tiresome subject. She knew well Matthew did not care for her at all—in fact disliked her. But she respected him for his honest service and his faithfulness to the Lindsays. Mildred dared not question, though her heart was aching with the words she longed to pour forth. Hugh laughingly mentioned Elizabeth's anger toward the visitor.

"She is quite right," said Aunt Estelle. "One should not take so old a man by surprise—he must be really eighty-five if he's a day. Strange that old people grow so careless of each other."

"I judged him to be a man of fifty or thereabouts," said Hugh. "Not so old, aunt."

"Did you see him?" asked Mildred, eagerly.

"Just a glimpse," answered Hugh.

"How long will he remain?" she asked again. "Has Matthew said?"

"Nothing—I did not ask. I hope his going won't affect the old man as much as his coming."

"A visitor at a servant's, and the house is by the ears!" cried Leigh to Bayard Cameron. He smiled in a half-hearted fashion, for Gertrude had been very cold to him all day—and when she was cold he was miserable.

"We are simple people, and appreciate the fidelity of those who serve us," said Uncle Eric, shortly. "Perhaps that is why we are interested in so small a thing."

The girl raised her eyes to Eric Lindsay's face.

"I do not mean to be unkind," she said, with the frank manner she knew so well how to assume. "I think that Matthew is greatly to be praised, and it is only right that you should do your best for one so faithful when he is ill. So please do not misunderstand me."

She spoke so gently that Hugh's eyes met hers with a tender expression in their depths. He was satisfied once more.

* * * * *

"My poor Matthew really gives me great concern," said Uncle Eric to Hugh the next morning at breakfast. "He has just been here, looking like a ghost, and assured me that he was feeling perfectly well again. When I said to him that visitors must be more or less of a burden just now, he smiled, and let the subject drop without answering me in any way. That is very unlike my old Matthew."

"He is much older than you are, uncle. Perhaps it is just the crankiness of age. In his own good time he'll be willing to tell you all about this strange visitor of his. By the way, I have met this Williams face to face. I was walking through the woods an hour ago, when I stumbled across him. He is a tall man with broad shoulders and gray hair. About fifty years old I should judge, as I told you yesterday." He did not notice that Mildred was staring at him, anxious not to lose a word. "He seemed quite startled at sight of me, and stood aside to let me pass, so that I got a good look at him. I bade him the time of day and went on."

"About fifty!" said Mildred now, in a disappointed tone. She knew that the Allan Fraser ex-Senator Hilliard had spoken of was young. "I thought he was younger than that."

Hugh glanced at her half-smilingly.

"How could you know," he asked, lightly, "how old or young he was?"

"And what does it really matter if he's eighty?" put in Leigh.

"Let us all go out on a still hunt for Horton's visitor," exclaimed Roger Cameron. "Are you with us, Senator? The first one discovers him to give the view halloo—we can then inspect him at our leisure."

"I have pleasanter prospects," said Lewis Hilliard. "Miss Mildred has promised me the pleasure of her company this morning. We drive together."

"Oh, but what about that question I asked you yesterday?" said Leigh.

"I am still considering it," answered the Senator. "That is business; we'll talk of it later on—after my drive," with a bend of the head toward Mildred, who colored slightly at the look on his face and dropped her eyes.

Uncle Eric stared from him to the girl. A sudden light dawned on him. Well, it would be a good thing for Mildred to marry such a well-born man—poor Uncle Eric, how that phrase "well-born" haunted him! Of course, he was much older than she—but Mildred was not a child any longer now. If that little witch Gertrude would but make up her mind to have Bayard Cameron he could die content, he thought. He must speak to her, and see what she really meant to do. It was a subject which, despite their late intimacy, had never risen between them for discussion. His eyes had been troublesome and painful this last few weeks—so much so that Gertrude had constituted herself his secretary. No one thought it strange when they left the dining-room together, and only one looked after them wistfully.

The old man did not take the usual papers from his desk this morning as his young amanuensis seated herself beside him. Instead he leaned back in the revolving-chair, swung round in it, and sat in silence looking at her.

"Come nearer to me, child," he said. "Come where I can see your face. The old fellow is not so keen-eyed as once he was. And I have a question to ask which those features of yours will answer, if your lips refuse to. Come here to me."

She rose obediently, and, wondering, came over, kneeling with her little face turned up to his, her hands clasped across the arm of his chair.

"Since you came back from your visit to Hugh's mother last year," he said abruptly, "you are a changed girl. Do you know that?"

"Am I, uncle?"

"Yes. I let my baby girl go away from me—oh, what a wilful, prickly little girl she was! I let her go because I saw she was unhappy in this great house, surrounded by people she would not try to understand, with one old man who loved her but could not show his affection because his heart was sour. I let you go—and you came back to me. In those seven weeks, Gertrude, something happened—something that changed your whole life. Now I ask you what it was."

She hesitated, and her fingers tightened over the leather arm of the chair nervously.

"I can tell you a part of it," she said, slowly. "I *was* unhappy, dreadfully unhappy last year. And when Hugh came and pictured his home, with his mother and his sisters, with the common things of every day glorified by love, my heart almost broke. One day—the day I had that horrid quarrel with Aunt Estelle, he tried to comfort me, and I told him I would apologize to her if he would take me to his mother just for a little while. I wanted to see a real, live Catholic mother, Uncle Eric—and I was such a bad-tempered girl here I just felt I *couldn't* be good until I saw how good people acted."

Uncle Eric smiled a little at the inference, but her eyes were downcast and she did not see it.

"So I went to Hugh's—as you know. Oh, uncle!" Her breath came quickly now, her bosom heaved. "Such a little, little house it was—so sweet and so dainty—and so *good!* With long honeysuckle vines trailing over the front porch, and two big lilac bushes at the front gate, and a long arbor, covered with the green leaves of the grape running down to the yard, as they called it. The windows were all open, and the white curtains

tied with blue ribbons were waving in the breeze. And in one corner of the parlor was the smallest, littlest, cutest cottage piano! And there were two funny china dogs—one on each side of the mantel, and I used to lay down on the rug and call them Gyp and Marty, and France and I used to play with them— Oh, Uncle Eric, Uncle Eric—you're not *crying*, Uncle Eric?"

"My poor little child!" he said, huskily. "My poor little hungry-hearted, lonely child!"

For her dreamy voice had stirred him as he had never been stirred in all his life before. The coldness of years melted at its sound. The splendid Southern chivalry lying dormant in his breast woke, as he saw how this girl could love—woke with a force and a bound that sent the blood in great quivering gushes through his frame. He saw how dear that home had been to her, when its slightest details were so imprinted on her heart. The girl's brown eyes were soft but not tearful now. She crept nearer to him, slipped between his knees, and put her head upon his breast with her arms about him. Then her little hand sought his face, his tear-wet eyes, and wiped them dry.

"That—was long ago, Uncle Eric," she went on, softly. "So very, very long ago—it is no use feeling badly about it now. There was a soul in that house, Uncle Eric—a noble, beautiful soul. Hugh's mother came to me. I shall never forget the first sight of her face, with its mild eyes, when she saw me, opened her arms to me, and kissed me and welcomed me. Ah, well! I can't describe Hugh's mother to you, Uncle Eric. I was a bad girl often, oh, so often! I said bitter things about you and about Aunt Estelle and about Mildred, who is so cold. She never interrupted me—only let me talk away, looking at me with sad eyes—eyes that soon silenced me by their very graveness. By and by, when she took me to her great heart, and I grew to know her, I tried to be like her. Oh, how I love her, Uncle Eric! My own mother must have been like that."

He did not answer her. She waited—but no words came.

"I did not want to come back. I told her I would be her servant, her child, anything, so that she kept me and loved me and

let me be near her. Hugh came, too, to make me go, but I'd never, never go for him. And then she asked me to listen to her. She told me a story. Shall I repeat it to you, uncle? You won't mind me telling it now? It is about my father and my mother. How you had loved my mother in your youth, and that when they both died and father's affairs were tangled and twisted and shrouded in debt, you took them all on your shoulders—you paid them all, and brought me home—and that Aunt Estelle had never known. She said she had never met you, but she felt that there was love in your heart for me, or you would never have done that thing. At that moment, Uncle Eric, I learned to care for you. I saw that your life was lonely, pitiful, in spite of all your wealth. And I came back to you willingly, resolved to do my best for you, and to love you as long as you would let me."

"What you have been—" he said in a broken voice. "What—you—have—been—to—me—"

He could not speak another word. His head drooped until his cheek rested on her hair. It was a holy moment. The peace of God filled him as he sat with his arms clasped about the form of the girl who would have been his daughter had he followed the promptings of his heart. He was back in the past then. He would not have been the wealthy, honored man he was to-day—but he would have known at least some share of happiness. He had been a good husband, faithful and kind in his own way—but sitting thus, he knew that love was the only thing in the world.

"You have made me very happy," he said at last. "I never thought to be so happy in all my life again, Gertrude. Your father was a better man and a nobler man than I—and your mother loved him dearly. If I gave her up, offered her on the altar of my ambition, she lost nothing, I everything. And is it because you learned all this that you have been so kind to your old uncle?"

"Partly because of this," she answered.

"Partly? There is more then?"

"There is more," she answered, in a low voice. He put his

hand under her chin and raised her face to his gaze. But the soft brown eyes met his veiled, and he could not see beneath.

"More?" he repeated, curiously. "Won't you trust me, Gertrude?"

"My secret now, uncle." She struggled from his embrace to her feet. "A little, foolish, nonsensical dream I had, from which I was rudely awakened. I shall never sleep again."

"My girl—"

"No questions, uncle." She laughed now, and perched herself on the arm of the chair. "To business, if you please—we have wasted enough time this morning. Where are those details of the wood sale Hugh brought from old Matthew's yesterday? Let us go over them at once."

And it was not until that evening, when he saw them both together, that Uncle Eric remembered Bayard Cameron's existence, and that he had meant to urge the young man's suit. More than ever he felt that he should do so. His little girl must not be left alone and unprotected if anything happened to him.

* * * * *

The ex-Senator's drive had not been a success. In fact, he had asked Miss Mildred to marry him, and she had not softened her refusal in any way. At his age he could not swear the passionate devotion of youth, but he could offer her prospects, and he detailed these with much skill. She, however, surprised him by her reception of his remarks.

"I may appear unfeeling," she said, "and cold to people—still that does not render me unconscious of the honor you do me. I thank you for it. But I am really primitive enough to believe in love. I tell you what I do now, so that you will see, once for all, that I can never change my mind. I loved some one with my whole heart and soul. I love him still. He is dead, but I shall never marry."

Her words, the unconcerned tones in which she couched them, for fear, indeed, of betraying how deeply their utterance stirred her, startled the easygoing wooer a little. He could scarcely believe his ears. He accepted his dismissal gracefully, however, saying

the usual things—should she ever need a friend, etc., etc., etc., and took the afternoon to digest her speech. That night when she came down to the evening meal he really felt that she had never been so desirable. Perhaps, since she was only a woman after all, she had dressed with a view to showing him how much he was losing. Her gown was of some thin, black, shimmery stuff that clung to her, and it was sprinkled with small gold sequins that glinted as she walked. She wore a row of little yellow coins about her throat, her only ornament. Even Leigh looked at her in some amazement. Her shining, white, cold beauty had never appeared to such advantage.

No one was much inclined that evening for the music Uncle Eric loved to hear. The lights were dim, the windows opened, and the soft breeze, heavy with odorous night-dew, filled the room. Mrs. Fenton had retired to write letters, Aunt Estelle with a headache. Gertrude sat in her favorite position on a low stool at Uncle Eric's knee, her cheek resting against it, huddled up in the crouching posture Aunt Estelle would not have tolerated were she in the room. But Aunt Estelle was not there and Gertrude felt she could do as she pleased. She was looking out across the low window-sill into the peaceful beauty of the night, her thoughts too deep for words. Her heart was afame. She saw, with unerring eyes, Hugh's future unhappiness. She noticed even now how his gaze followed the girl he loved, always with a question in it—always doubtingly, always sorrowfully, his whole soul disturbed, his honest face full of care. Oh, if the future could but change all this, what harm? But would Leigh be wiser as the years flew past? She thought of that happy home in Westport, of the loving mother, whose idolized boy—

She sighed deeply, and as if in response to that sigh she felt Uncle Eric's hand clasp hers suddenly. She looked up. Bayard Cameron was leaning on the arm of his chair, his eyes fastened upon her. She knew the pleading in them, even though his lips were silent, as she had bidden them to be. She knew the longing on his handsome face, the wistfulness of it.

Oh, why could she not make him happy? Why could she not

be satisfied? He was so good, so true. Uncle Eric would be pleased—

At some moment in every woman's life the wild longing to take the good that lies at hand assails her as it assailed Gertrude now. Again she turned her eyes to the duskiness of wood and forest. Eric Lindsay and her lover began conversing in low tones. She did not heed them. It meant so much more to a girl to marry where she did not love. She dared not risk it. If God gave her children—

And then suddenly, as if in answer to her troubled thoughts, a sound broke the silence. She sat upright, erect, listening. What was it? The breeze? Oh, no, the breeze, in its most glorious mood, never carried such beauty on its wings! What was it? Against their will, almost, the occupants of that room turned to the window, listening, afraid to breathe, afraid to stir. How soft, how sweet, how touching, how fiery— Gertrude could not move when at last it died away; her heart gave a bound of disappointment when she felt that it had really ceased.

"A violin!" she whispered then. "A violin! Oh, who is it, who is it, who can it be?"

She felt raised, exultant. It had been a song of hope, of high aspirations, an answer to the doubts struggling in her breast. She glanced around her half-fearfully. Had they heard also? Or was it intended only for her ears? Some supernatural message—

"What is it?" cried Leigh Fenton. She had risen under the influence of the music and stood drawn to her full height, looking about her with frightened eyes.

"Some one is playing a violin in old Matthew's cottage," answered Hugh. "He is an artist, if it is that visitor of his!"

"A magician!" cried Leigh again. "A magician, Hugh. Oh, it has taken my heart out of my body—it is drawing me in spite of myself. I have no will, no power left. Let us go, Hugh, oh, let us go—"

"Go where, you foolish child?" asked Hugh, smiling at her excitement.

"Anywhere, that I may hear it again. Just to hear it again,

Hugh," she pleaded swiftly. "Let us go to thank him—it is not far to the cottage—"

She looked around her, confused, passed her hand across her forehead, and burst into tears. In alarm Hugh sprang up to put his arm about her.

"You are ill, nervous, excited," he said in a troubled voice. "Why, Leigh—"

"Music always upsets her," said Senator Hilliard. "I'd advise you to go to your own room, and not hear any more of it." Mildred, sitting cold and silent, did not speak.

"Please don't send me away—I must hear him if he plays again," protested Leigh. "Hugh, don't let them send me away."

"You will be ill," said Uncle Eric, gruffly. "Close the window, Gertrude, at once. I hate violins and violinists."

He spoke savagely, and Gertrude sprang up to obey. But Bayard Cameron was before her. He shut in the big French windows, then caught her hand as she turned to go back to her guardian's side.

"What did it say to you, Gertrude?" he pleaded. "It told me much that I was longing to hear—it bade me hope. Oh, Gertrude, just one word—tell me to wait, Gertrude—and if I have to serve as Jacob did for Rachel, I shall rest content. Just that word, Gertrude. My heart is breaking without it."

"Please," she whispered in an uncertain voice, almost carried away by the intensity of his tone. "Please, Bayard—"

"Bid me hope—that isn't much, surely," he urged. "You do not promise to marry me—you simply say there is a chance for me. There is no one you like better, and you shall, you *must* learn to love me. Gertrude, let me hear it—only one single word of hope, dear. Can't you say it, whisper it, look at me—"

"In the future—perhaps—I can not tell. Bayard, Bayard, I feel as though I were dying. Let me go—I must have time to think—let me have a little time to think."

He crushed the hand he had grasped to his lips, and their touch burned her. She was dizzy, confused, the room was whirling about her. She felt for a chair and held on to it blindly,

trying to steady herself. The very passion of his pleading had carried her off her feet. Another moment and she would have promised anything to get away from him. And ever through it all her heart was beating in rebellion against him, warning her even as he spoke. She stumbled a little when she got to Uncle Eric's side. His face was gray and drawn, but for once she did not notice him. Mildred and Leigh were standing close to her. Leigh had recovered some of her composure.

"He must be higher than he seems," said she to Mildred. "None but a man highly-born and nobly-bred could play like that."

Mildred laughed disagreeably.

"Artists—real ones—are seldom nobly born," she said. "It speaks ill for you aristocrats, but it is the truth."

Had they all gone mad? thought Gertrude, walking slowly toward the door with down-drooped head. She did not know that Hugh was holding it open for her, and that he said good night, or that Mildred came close behind her also without being aware of his presence. He asked himself the same question when he watched them going up the stairs. Had the strange music driven them all mad?

* * * * *

She would not hurry herself. She walked with slow and stately step along the hall, her black gown trailing after her, her golden head held high. She opened the door, entered her own room, slipped the bolt. Then she tore the string of golden coins from her neck and flung them with passionate force upon the table. She went swiftly to the window, flung it wide, and almost threw her body across the sill. Down beneath her the little light still twinkled in old Matthew's cottage. Her eyes strained toward it. Her fingers clasped, her lips moved.

"Fools!" she said. "Fools—not to know!"

Then:

"Only one sign!" she whispered. "I have said I did not believe in God! O God, I lied. I do, I do, I do! Have pity upon me. Merciful Father, you who implanted this heart within

my breast, just as it is, with all its faults, give me the sign I crave. Have pity on an erring child who is lying now at your feet—who is praying, praying, praying. O God, give me one sign!"

The voice, the words, the straining of that tense body showed her earnestness. And, as if in answer, a melody stole out and upward to her waiting ears. A simple air now, filled with pathos—"Heimweh," and the player's heart must have been filled with the homesickness he portrayed. Longing sorrow, painful grief were borne to her on the night wind. Slowly the tenseness of her body left it, slowly the white horror left her face, the strain relaxed. She drew back. She went down to the floor on her knees, her head bowed on the broad sill. The tears were streaming from her eyes. Her breast rose and fell, and rose again in convulsive sobs.

"He lives! He lives! It was a lie—a cruel lie. That is my song, played as only he could play it. He lives! My God, how can I thank Thee—how can I ever thank Thee?"

CHAPTER XVII.

UNCLE ERIC'S VISITOR.

WHEN Mildred appeared the next morning all eyes turned on her in astonishment. She was white and exhausted-looking, with heavy black shadows encircling her violet orbs, making them even darker than usual. In answer to the surprised questioning of those about her, she answered, truthfully enough, that she had not slept well, and that her head was aching.

"Is Mr. Hilliard ill also?" she asked, indicating the ex-Senator's vacant place, and trying, by the remark, to divert attention from herself.

"No," answered Mrs. Fenton. "He was called to Kentboro this morning. He left a message for you, Leigh," turning to her daughter. "He says he can not find the address you wanted, and that the very best thing you can do is to put the subject out of your mind altogether."

Leigh looked a little startled—then frowned, an expression of blank disappointment settling on her fair face.

"Oh, of course, when I want anything especially bad Uncle Lewis won't get it for me. He knows a jeweler from whom I wished to order something," she explained to her mother. "That's just like Uncle Lewis—he won't put himself to a bit of trouble."

"May I?" asked Hugh, quickly. "Tell me what you want, Leigh."

She smiled at him.

"Not you," with an adorable glance. "I don't want *you* to get it for me—this is a secret."

She laughed then and he laughed with her, little guessing how true her words were, and how they affected himself.

Uncle Eric felt strangely ill. The violin playing of the previous evening had disturbed him more than any one knew. It had brought bad dreams. All night long he had been quarreling with Laurence as in the long-past days—all night the dead man's face had haunted him, now smiling and joyous, now drawn and white and ghastly.

Gertrude also looked worn and half-frightened—for she dreaded the ordeal she knew she had to face that day when Bayard Cameron sought her alone. The only comfortable people at the table were Mrs. Fenton and Aunt Estelle.

Mildred rose from her barely-tasted breakfast and walked out into the hall, where she lingered a moment for fear of curious eyes. There was a tumult raging in her breast, for the next hour must solve the doubts that tortured her. If Laurence Lindsay were alive he would not keep himself concealed from her, nor hide his identity. Once beyond sight of the house and away from possible prying, her feet fairly flew, as she passed under the chestnut trees. She did not turn to Matthew's cottage—but instead to the old-time trysting-place, the place where they had said farewell, to the rustic bridge built over the Lindsay stream. For if there were one single thought of her in his heart, one memory of the olden days, it was here he would come to see her first—it was here she would first look upon his face.

She could scarcely breathe—not from the hurry—she did not know that she was running with light steps along the path through the pines. Oh, those memories of old, and the bitter days between! Her chest was heaving with bounds that choked her, so that finally she stood still to recover herself—fearing to look, fearing that her eyes deceived her. Grasping at the bark of the tree near her she stood, helpless with doubt and longing.

For leaning across the bridge, back toward her, was the figure of a man.

And as she gazed the doubt left her, and she was conscious only of a great gladness—a gladness that seemed to fall on her troubled spirit like a benediction, that seemed to strengthen her nervous limbs and ease away the numb pain at her heart. He,

perhaps feeling that intent gaze, stirred restlessly, turned, and so, across the lapse of years, they met.

The disfiguring glasses, the gray hair and beard that had made Hugh take him for an older man were gone. There before her stood Laurence Lindsay, older, sadder, and much more thoughtful, but the Laurence Lindsay she had known and loved.

“Mildred!” came his voice, low and trembling. “Mildred!”

His eyes were shining, his face lit up. She could not come to him by reason of the passion of joy that quivered through her. But he came to her and took her hand, that lay at her side, and the other hand grasping at the bark of the tree for support—took both those hands in his, and then seeing how violently she trembled he put his arm about her and held her, reverently, looking down at her darkened eyes, her pale, glad face. He said nothing. The words that were seething through her brain, tumbling to her lips, she forced back, waiting.

“Mildred!” he said again. “True and faithful—faithful unto death, aye, and beyond death—forever. How can I thank you, Mildred?”

“Why are you here, Laurence? Oh, Laurence, I have been so unhappy!”

“Unhappy?” He spoke the word in wonder. “And over me? Over the most unworthy friend a woman ever had? Nay, I have been too unhappy myself—do not make it worse for me. Tell me—did you know—last night?”

“That message was for me, then?” she asked, tenderly. “I knew at once, and when ‘Heimweh’ came—well, Laurence, I have not slept since for thinking of it—and of you. And if I had come this morning, and you were not here to greet me, I should have died. Laurence, I could not have stood another disappointment.”

“This is my third visit, Mildred. I have haunted this spot in the hopes of seeing you—for Matthew was too shaken to be trusted with a message, and besides, I would not let him carry it—it was too precious,” with a reassuring smile. “Come, let us

sit down here and talk over the past with its misery—the future with its hopes—”

There was something strange about him—a thoughtfulness, a gravity, the careless fellow she had known did not possess. He led her, still with his arm about her, to the little seat at the foot of the bridge.

“When you wrote to me, thinking me Fraser,” he began, “it was the last straw. When Hilliard left me that day at Monte Carlo I went wild almost, to think that *he* could walk, free as air, under the golden sun of my childhood’s home. Mildred, let me pour out my pain to you—for it is eating at my heart. Mildred, Mildred, is it true that I am here—here at Lindsay Manor, on Lindsay ground, with you?”

She knew then that the curse of the Lindsays, as the passionate love of their home had ever been called, was stirring in this man’s blood. That she, no matter how dearly she loved him, must ever take second place. About every true woman there is the maternal instinct, a protecting tenderness. Her joy gave way to pity for him, a great and sorrowful pity.

“Tell me all, Laurence,” she whispered, softly. “Am I not your friend? Tell me all and let me comfort you.”

“Well, dear, after I left you that day so many years ago, I fared very ill for a long time. I wandered all over the world, it seems to me, now living in a palace, now earning my supper by my skill on the violin. It was during one of these poorer moments that I met Allan Fraser. We traveled together, leading a wandering life, now here, now there, until we finally ended in Central America. We had all sorts of luck, and were on the high road to prosperity when the fever took him. He wasn’t a strong fellow at best, but had had always a fund of ambition to draw on, that served him in place of a good constitution. It didn’t serve him now. He knew at the very beginning that he was going to die. I knew it, too, and I was heart-sick, for he was the only companion I had ever cared for, and I was deeply attached to him. He advised me, since I had cut loose from my family and all old traditions, to bury my name also, to take his, and with the wealth

we had made together, start a new life. Dazzled for the moment, I consented. I returned to Eric Lindsay's lawyers every paper that proved my identity, took Fraser's name, and under Fraser's name began a new career. He is buried out there in Costa Rica as Laurence Lindsay."

"And then?" she asked.

"I went back to Europe. I gambled, I played, I did as I pleased and as it suited me. It was while at Rome that I met Senator Hilliard—and his niece."

"His niece!" Mildred's face went suddenly white. "How queerly you say that! Leigh Fenton?"

"Americans like myself—nay, more, South Carolinians, my heart opened to them, warmed to them. It was talking to them first that the terrible fever for Lindsay rose within me. That fever has burned in my veins ever since—it is killing me, Mildred."

"Yes, yes—but Leigh Fenton—"

"I liked her because she came from Kentboro, from where my mother was. Poor mother! I never realized I had a mother until Matthew told me she was gone. Did you see her before she died, Mildred? Surely you saw her—were with her—"

"No, Laurence, I was not," she returned, in a low voice. "She never heard the news of your death—because when Harry died she went out of her mind. No one could do anything with her, Laurence—she did not know any one. And she died very quietly and peacefully, they say, though I was not near her at the end. Uncle Eric let Gertrude and me go to her funeral. It was a mercy that—that she could not remember, dear. Do not feel so badly over it now. It was a blessed thing."

"What a wicked man I have been, how ungrateful, how—"

"You shall not blame yourself," she returned. "I have defended you against all the world—I shall defend you even against yourself."

The silence that fell between them lasted long. A new fear was trembling in Mildred's breast. Love is quick to take alarm. His hesitation, the change in his voice when he spoke of Leigh

Fenton, filled her with foreboding. To Laurence, that silence was bitter as gall, for his own neglect, brought home to him vividly by those few words, rose in all its blackness before him. The birds above them flew over their heads in the golden light, the soft breath of the odorous breeze lifted the fair hair from Mildred's temples; there was a drowsy buzz about them and around them. The rippling waters seemed to wait to catch the burden of the girl's troubled mind, the sorrow of the man's. At last she stirred. Her hand, lying idly in his clasp, withdrew slowly, and she sighed.

"Tell me more," she said. "Go on, Laurence. What about Leigh Fenton?"

"I really liked her, Mildred—her beauty appealed to me as all beautiful things do. But more than everything else, her likeness to you was so striking that it startled me, attracted my lonely, homesick soul. Something might have come to pass between us then, for she, in return, seemed to care for me. But the wisdom of her elders, and her own natural sagacity, showed her how poor a match I would be for her—who had such a brilliant future before her. There was no chance for Allan Fraser, the harum-scarum, reckless violinist."

He spoke bitterly. The girl beside him sat as if carved of stone.

"Her uncle, the ex-Senator, and I, were very good friends, as friendship goes with such a man," he went on. "We met often, and in the most out of the way places, or perhaps I did not avoid him, since he could talk to me of the home that I loved. I was with him when he was called to Kentboro by reason of his niece's engagement to Hugh Lindsay—Hugh Lindsay, my cousin! What sort of a fellow is this cousin of mine, Mildred?"

"An honest and an honorable man," she said, with white lips.

"So. Well, I am glad of that. After Hilliard left I felt that I could not contain myself—it was impossible to resign myself to the thought of never seeing Lindsay again. In my restlessness I struck out for Paris immediately. Your letter reached me there. Oh, Mildred, that letter, that letter! It was

like a call from the past—and though I had resisted my own longings, that letter carried me away—I could not bear it after that. I wrote you, as you know. Then as soon as I could manage it, for I did not want to return here penniless, and my funds were pretty low, I came to Matthew. He, too, believed me dead, poor, good-hearted old chap. But for three days, three royal, gracious days, I have had free range of my own domain."

"And now," half-fearfully. "And now?"

"Now I am going to Uncle Eric."

"To Uncle Eric! *Laurence!*"

"I am going to Uncle Eric," he went on determinedly. "I don't want a penny of his money—not a sou. But I want Lindsay. Every drop of blood in my body tells me it is mine, mine, mine! No other man shall ever call himself the master of the Manor."

"Are you mad, are you mad?" cried Mildred. "What will Uncle Eric think, or say, or do, if you go to him in such a fashion?"

"He will understand—I hope, for he, too, knows what it is to have the Lindsay fever in his veins. He will understand, I hope, I hope. I shall not be passionate, I shall not be angry—I shall be as I have never been toward him. Mildred, he loved me in the past—there must be some of the old love left in him still. Until I heard of Harold's death—which was at the time the news of Miss Fenton's engagement reached me—I never knew that another branch of the Lindsays had been transplanted here. Hugh Lindsay! The name struck like death upon me."

Mildred shook her head.

"Would to God I could give you hope," she said. "Would to God I could—but I can not. The old hatred is but slumbering in Uncle Eric's breast—it is there, my poor *Laurence*, fierce and bitter still, made worse by the very intensity of his old affection. Only last night when he heard the violin—"

"Nevertheless I must see him—now—at once."

"But he is ill, *Laurence*."

"Not in bed?"

"No; but—"

"Then an interview with me can not hurt him. Rise or fall, I go to him to-day."

"Like that, without your disguise, your gray beard—"

"Even as I am—I am not ashamed. Ah, Mildred, breathe one prayer for my welfare." He took her hand in his—it was cold as ice—and kissed it.

"Will you come with me, or shall I go alone?" he asked.

"I had rather you went alone, Laurence. I feel fatigued and tired—"

He rose and left her. She watched him as he disappeared among the trees, along the path down which she had come so short a while ago with beating pulses. She was conscious of no pain—only all life seemed empty and valueless. She had brought him home—home that he might tell her he cared for another. She had brought him home that she might hold the joy of seeing him to her breast for one brief moment—and then have that joy dashed from her forever. She had brought him home that he might seek his old place in his uncle's heart—perhaps win it, and with it Leigh Fenton. And with that thought she prayed for him indeed—that he might lose instead of winning. He had ever been reckless, risking all on a mad impulse, and the impulse that had sent him now to face his uncle's wrath and anger might be the destruction of all his hopes, she knew.

No wonder Leigh Fenton shook at the very name of Fraser. No wonder her actions had been queer, her face pale the day she first saw Laurence's picture—she must have recognized it as Allan Fraser's then—no two men could have had so many coincidences binding them together. Poor Mildred's brain was in a whirl. Fraser was dead and Laurence was alive. Fraser loved Leigh and Leigh loved Fraser—and Fraser was Laurence, her idol, her only love. Her head drooped, her eyes closed. This was the bitterest blow that could befall. Now indeed it was time to die!

* * * * *

When Uncle Eric retired to the library he would not permit even Gertrude to accompany him, desperately as she pleaded. He told her that he desired to be alone, and he sat now with his head

bowed upon his hands, trying to think, to collect his wandering thoughts. And so he sat, idle, as the moments crept by.

When, then, there came a hesitating tap at the door he bade whoever it might be to enter. He did not turn in his chair when the old butler stood behind him—therefore he did not notice the trembling of the old man's lips when he said a gentleman desired to see him on business.

"Let him come," said Uncle Eric, wearily. "And if you can find Miss Gertrude send her here."

Gertrude would remember, he thought, listlessly. His brain was tired, his body was tired. Gertrude knew all about things, and he could not stand being bothered. Old Matthew—no, he was sick, too—Gertrude could tell Hugh, and Hugh must begin to arrange matters now, he would be master in a little while—a little while—

The door opened and closed behind him. He waited for his visitor to approach, and when he did not, turned his head restlessly.

"You desire to see me?" he asked, in a querulous tone.

"Yes; I do," answered a strange voice.

Uncle Eric sat up straight, and his eyes stared in front of him with a glassy fixedness.

"Come over here, please. Sit down. Yes, I— My God!"

He knew who his visitor was now. His breath failed him, he grew purple, his eyes rolled. Then he collapsed weakly.

"You know who I am, uncle?" asked the young man, in a trembling voice. "Uncle Eric, you do know me?"

"Aye, I have cause to know you!" said Uncle Eric. "Ingrate, spendthrift, snake!" he hissed out the last word. "I have cause to know you, vagabond."

"Uncle Eric, by the old love I plead—I beseech you just to hear me. By all the old ties, by Lindsay itself, every stone of which I reverence—"

"You will find my check-book at your elbow," said Uncle Eric. "Hand it to me. How much money do you want?"

"I do not want your money, Uncle Eric."

"No?" in a slow, thick, insulting voice. "You do not want my money? Then are the heavens about to fall?"

"Oh, Uncle Eric, won't you let me speak to you? See, I will be humble—I am not the man who left you in anger now. As for money, I have enough to live on. But the curse of the Lindsays has fallen on me, and I have not been able to resist it. I have been drawn here—almost against my will, I tell you, by my love for the old home. Ah, believe me," he pleaded passionately, seeing the gathering blackness on Uncle Eric's face. "You loved me once—let me prove to you that I may yet deserve your trust, your affection. A scapegrace have I been—a miserable ingrate! But do we not all do things we are sorry for? Give me but the freedom of this dear old place, the shelter of a cottage on its grounds, and I shall be content."

It was a pathetic appeal—he had not meant, with all his unswerving purpose, to be so humble. But the sight of the Manor, the sight of that aged and worn face—that face that had smiled on him so often in his careless youth, impressed him with a sense of his own rash daring. Uncle Eric listened to the words that poured from his lips, unstirred, unmoved save by the fiercest anger, gripping the arms of his chair. He spoke, and every syllable came out sharp, distinct, incisive.

"And I repeat to you the words I said to you the day you left here—that dead or living, in Lindsay Manor you shall never rest your head. So you have come back, have you?" contemptuously. "You have come back to the doting old man who took you and your brother to his heart and conferred benefit after benefit upon you! You have come back to the one you scorned and sneered at? Well, you shall not stay. Go!"

"Uncle, I can only acknowledge that your words are true ones—I bow to them. I was mad to fancy that you could ever grant me pardon. But since I can not quench the flame my past wrong-doing has roused in you—" He choked desperately and dashed his hair back from his eyes. "Will you shake hands with me, Uncle Eric?"

The old man's eyes traveled from face to outstretched hand

with a smile upon his lips—a smile worse than a blow—then he turned his head aside and the hand dropped. Laurence went to the door. He turned to look at his uncle again, one last, long look, and closed the door behind him.

Eric Lindsay, sitting silent, could not think clearly. All was confusion. Then suddenly his body seemed to separate from him, and his head twirled around on top of it. Sparks danced before his eyes. His hand sought the electric button, felt it, pressed it. He kept his finger on it. His servants ran up at the continued peal, his wife meeting them in their alarm, and all entered the room together. Aunt Estelle ran to his side and lifted the stiff hand still pressing the bell, looking down with affright into his face.

“Hugh!” he said thickly and uncertainly. “Hugh is master of Lindsay—Hugh, Hugh, Hugh!”

And the lights and faces and sparks went out in a great, impenetrable darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BUNCH OF KEYS.

THE doctors were summoned hastily—two from Kentboro, and Hugh sent a telegram to Charleston for a well-known specialist. They diagnosed Eric Lindsay's stroke as congestion of the brain, and on Aunt Estelle beseeching them to tell her the truth, admitted that a complete recovery could not be expected. To Hugh, indeed, they gave grave words of advice, and he knew, from their manner, that the old master of Lindsay was in a bad way. The butler who had admitted Laurence kept his own counsel, for he was devoted to him. No one else had seen the young man enter, no one else save Matthew and Mildred was aware of the fact that Laurence Lindsay had come home again. Therefore, for the time being, the knowledge that Eric Lindsay had been stricken after an interview with his nephew was a secret.

The whole house was in confusion. Aunt Estelle scarcely left her husband's bedside. When Hugh suggested trained nurses—forgetting her old-fashioned ways—she turned on him angrily. The old man lay in a stupor, and the woman who had been so long wrapped up in the pomp of the world and its vanity gave place to a faithful wife, whose every thought was centered on his recumbent form.

Day after day passed. Hugh's time of absence expired, but he could not leave Lindsay when his aunt depended so much upon him. He and Gertrude worked together with her faithfully. At first Aunt Estelle seemed to resent the girl's presence, but when she read the real concern on her face, and saw how dear she was to the sick man, who, in half-conscious moments, called her name tenderly, she willingly consented to allow her to remain with him.

Her presence seemed to soothe him, but the moment Mildred entered the room he showed restlessness. Soon she just made inquiries concerning him at the door and passed on. In the brief glimpses she had of him she felt guilty. She saw the pain on Aunt Estelle's face, and knew that the master of the Manor would, in all probability, never rise from his sick-bed. Was she not partly responsible? Had it not been her letter that brought Laurence Lindsay home to seek the interview that had precipitated this seizure?

In the meanwhile, Mrs. Fenton sat in her own luxurious room, reading romances and eating bonbons. She had offered, indeed, to return to Kentboro, despite Leigh's pleading to remain. Aunt Estelle told her very kindly that she was neither bother nor trouble—which was true, for Mrs. Lindsay saw but little of her now, and she stayed on, much to her daughter's delight. The other guests had left the afternoon that Uncle Eric was stricken, and one, Bayard Cameron, was glad to go, for Gertrude would have none of him, and he could not see her without pain.

Mrs. Fenton was waiting patiently for Uncle Eric's death. If, as they said, the old man could live but a short while, she thought it useless to go away, since she would only have to come back for the funeral. She wished, in her secret heart, that he would recover consciousness, and desire to have the marriage take place at once. Even to her careless eyes it appeared that Hugh was less lover-like and more formal, and she dreaded a breaking off of the match. Leigh's affection for him, half-hearted at best, seemed to have utterly flown. Would she, could she, dare she change her mind now, when everything was turning out so splendidly, when kind Providence was removing old Eric to make way for young Hugh? And she confessed, with tears, that Leigh could and would and dared do anything she pleased.

“One has nothing but trouble with one's children,” sighed the stout lady, and dug deeper into her box of chocolates for solace.

Certainly Leigh's manner was strange enough to cause her mother uneasiness. She was not worrying over Eric Lindsay—that thought was impossible, for she never entered his room,

saying that the sight of people suffering upset her. Mildred, watching her with cold, blue eyes, seeing below the surface now since Laurence Lindsay told her his story—felt her heart ache with jealousy of the girl's beauty, of her birth, of her grace, of everything that had made Laurence care for her. Leigh was too careless of those with whom she associated to read the hostility in her eyes or seek its cause. And especially was she too deeply wrapped up in herself now to pay attention to others. Since the day she had seen that portrait in the gallery many thoughts had taken hold of her. She guarded what she imagined was her exclusive secret very carefully. She knew that Fraser and Laurence were one person, and she had taken, at last, the mighty resolve of cutting herself loose from Hugh. Yes; it must come to that—it must finally come to that. She meant to write to Fraser, to tell him that she could not forget that she loved him, to risk all, to give all, and not to mention the fact that she knew his real name or station. Her mother's opposition—a wall of steel against the penniless Allan Fraser—would fall shattered at the prospect of having Laurence Lindsay for a son-in-law. She did not want Eric Lindsay to die. He must live, and she must try to win over his heart to the favor of his oldest nephew—his nephew, whom he thought dead. For Leigh Fenton, who had so often tested the power of her beauty, the witchery of her grace, upon susceptible masculine hearts, was supremely satisfied that her charm could not be resisted once she chose to exercise it—even on Uncle Eric.

* * * * *

At the end of two weeks Aunt Estelle was forced to acknowledge her own loss of strength. Hugh would not again advise nurses or servants as caretakers, for he felt that such a suggestion would but annoy her, in her present nervous state. Gertrude's hours of watching became longer and more tedious, and this also the young man took note of with alarm. Yet he could not do anything to help her. If he tried to take her place he was sure to be interrupted or called away, since all the business details connected with the Manor devolved upon him.

Entering, one morning, the pleasant little room which had been the family's favorite resort when Uncle Eric was well, but which was now seldom occupied, he found Leigh seated in luxurious idleness, her fingers between the closed book lying in her lap, her chin resting in her palm.

"Do you wish to please me very much?" he asked, going over to her with his kind smile.

"What is it?" she said, guardedly.

"The doctors have just compelled Aunt Estelle to retire to her room, with orders to Julie that she shall stay in bed for the day. They told her plainly she must save her strength—she would need it all later on. Poor Aunt Estelle!"

"Well?" asked Leigh, in a questioning tone.

"Gertrude has been up since midnight and old Matthew has come over to see me on business that can not be delayed. I shall only be engaged with him about an hour—will you take the girl's place until I can return, dear? There will be nothing to do but give uncle one dose of medicine—there is no change imminent."

She shivered.

"Oh, Hugh, I am really afraid," she said. "I can't even bear to look at him—you know that."

"Very well." He seemed much hurt, and would have withdrawn at once. Her brows met in a frown.

"I think your aunt is crazy not to hire a good nurse! Such nonsense I never heard of."

"You know how she feels about it—she takes pleasure in wearing herself out for him. It may be the last service she can ever render him—and such service is sweet to those who love, Leigh."

"Oh, service!" she shrugged her shoulders. "I can't see it in that light. And as for Gertrude Waring— Well, perhaps there is a reason for her being so attentive."

Hugh started as if she had struck him. His eyes scorched her; under their lightning glance she felt ashamed. She counted too much on the affection she had inspired in this man's breast. Love had come to him quickly indeed; perfect happiness for one

brief space of time had found him. But day by day she was teaching him the sad lesson of a shattered ideal—his idol had feet of clay. Day by day, since his honest love was not the passion that men usually miscall love, he looked below the beautiful eyes for the soul of her—and found it a distorted, shapeless thing. Happily for him, his uncle's illness had distracted him from these bitter thoughts. But they came upon him now, fierce and strong. He rebelled against his future—against her. She, looking at him, saw the change in him, felt that gaze burn deep, and she did not wait for the scornful retort she knew trembled upon his lips. She threw her book upon the floor, and springing to her feet, put both arms about his neck.

“Forgive me, Hugh—I did not mean that. But she seems such a paragon of goodness. And you all seem to be holding her up to me as an example—and I am jealous, Hugh.”

These words, two months ago, would have filled him with delight, as indicative of her affection—but now he received them coldly.

“No need to be,” he answered, putting his arm about her. He felt none of the joy of earlier days as he stood there, his sweetheart in his embrace. A great fear filled him. Supposing all their wedded life, the years and years of it that stretched before them, were to be like this? He expecting; she disappointing. Why did his mother's warning words recur to him just then? But he put them from him hurriedly. He dared not think. Everything must turn out well in the end, everything must, he said to himself, almost savagely. Once married to him and away from the surroundings and the people who had made her false world, he would teach her to look differently on life. The old love, the first love, the sweet, true, simple love, must come back to him. He spoke to her tenderly now, and left her. Giving a message to the butler for old Matthew, saying he could not be seen that day, he went to his uncle.

On tiptoes he approached the door of the sick-chamber through the dressing-room, and stood on the threshold. Gertrude sat beside the bed. He could not see her hands, which were

hidden in her lap, but he heard the click of her rosary-beads, and he knew that she was praying. She seemed such a lonely little figure that she brought back to him vividly the child he had chidden, advised, and comforted in what now seemed so long ago. How he had pitied her in his heart, and now how he respected her—how far even during these last few weeks she had grown above him! What a heart she had, this simple little girl! What an honest, unspoiled soul! With bowed head he leaned against the door, still watching her.

Uncle Eric moved, and spoke a word or two. Gertrude rose and bent over him, putting her hand on his forehead, and smoothing the pillow under his head. Then, looking at the index hand of the chart, she saw that it was time to administer his medicine. She gave it to him, and stood above him, her hand stroking his forehead gently in the way she knew eased his pain, until he dozed off. Then Hugh heard the beads fall to the floor—a soft click on the rug. She, stooping to pick them up, remained upon her knees, her face buried in the counterpane. He heard her quiet and subdued weeping, and he could stand the sight no longer. Approaching, he put his hand on her shoulder. She raised her face to his, with heavy eyes and parted lips.

“Run away, dear, for a while,” he whispered. “Just for an hour or two, and forget the gloom and trouble here, if you can.”

“Oh, Hugh, I’d rather stay,” she murmured. “He just said, ‘My good child.’ He really did—I heard him, Hugh. He does not like it if I go. And Hugh—”

“Yes, dear?”

“I am awfully afraid Uncle Eric will never get well.”

“It is no use saying anything else, Gertrude. Poor Uncle Eric’s day is over.”

She shuddered a little, and stood looking down at the gray face on the white pillow, clasping her hands about his arm.

“I’m afraid,” she said. “I’m afraid, Hugh. Not of Uncle Eric, dear Uncle Eric—but of his death. Oh, Hugh, this is no way for a man to die, is it? This isn’t the way a Catholic dies. Oh, Hugh, I am afraid. God is coming so near to him and he

doesn't know it, and he has never thought of God much; and what will he do, what will he do then, when that moment comes? Hugh, I am afraid."

She still clung, frightened, to him, and he did not know how to answer her. Her whispered sentences were full of the terror she felt at the great, unknown country into which the old man who had loved her was about to enter unprepared. Hugh felt he must say something that would ease the terror in her childish face.

"I would not be afraid," he said. "Uncle Eric has never been a member of our faith—he has not known its greatness, its beauty, its comfort—and God will consider that. Is He less merciful than you or I? And if we remember with tenderness the kindness and good-will underneath this man's exterior, won't God remember it, too? We can't do anything for him, Gertrude, only pray—and the God who knows all and sees all will take care of all."

He hesitated. More words trembled on his lips—but he felt he had said enough, and he repressed them.

"You had better run away now as I have bidden you. Supposing you break down? Be advised by me, little Gertrude; take care of yourself—for all our sakes."

There was a note in his voice that sent the hot blood in a gush to the girl's face. It receded then, leaving her as pale as death. She turned at once and left the room, while he took her vacant place.

She had not been gone very long when the door through which she had vanished opened softly and Leigh entered. She had not liked the look on Hugh's face when he left her—it had been very unsatisfactory. After all, she thought, with one of the qualms of common sense that came to her occasionally, she *must* marry some time. Fraser was gone, whither she knew not. Her Uncle Lewis had refused to tell her how or where she might find him. That finding might be long delayed—who could tell what might happen? And supposing, when she sent for him, he refused to come—though that supposition made the girl smile in her consum-

mate vanity. Supposing Uncle Eric were to die, and leave Hugh master of the Manor? Could she marry the poverty-stricken Laurence Lindsay any more than she could have married the poor violinist?

All these thoughts crossing her vacillating, selfish mind, she thought it best to humor her fiancé. Hugh, glancing up, saw her lovely eyes fastened on him almost in humility.

“ You have come, Leigh? How good of you! ” he whispered.

“ Hasn’t he grown old-looking? ” she ventured, approaching the bed. “ It seems impossible that he’ll ever get better, Hugh.”

“ Hugh put his fingers to his lips warningly.

“ You are right—I will be quiet. Tell me what I shall do now. Give me something to do.”

“ Above all, keep very still,” answered Hugh. “ When he awakes give him a drink, and in half an hour a teaspoonful of this medicine—”

“ And you—you must stay here, Hugh! Don’t leave me alone with him. He might die—or—something.”

“ Only one is needed. But sit down there, then, if you wish to keep me company. Or better still, here is a book. Go over to the window-seat and read.”

He spoke coldly. She took the book, however, and got as far away as possible from the sick-bed and the patient. It was an interesting volume, and she was soon lost in its contents. After a little while she totally forgot her surroundings. Suddenly she heard Hugh rise and Uncle Eric stir. His hands moved restlessly. She could see him from where she sat, herself hidden. His eyes were wide open.

“ Where is—Hugh? ”

“ Here, uncle.”

“ Alone? ”

“ Alone.”

“ Call Estelle—only Estelle.”

Leigh shrank back against the window-seat. Hugh left the room—he had forgotten her. The few minutes the girl spent there were like an eternity. She could see the sick man’s work-

ing features, she could hear his labored breathing. Then, to her infinite relief, Hugh returned, almost carrying his aunt. The poor woman had thrown on a silk négligée over her night-robe, and she looked ghastly—more like death, indeed, than her dying husband. Leigh put her hand across her lips to keep from screaming with terror at the sight of her and of him.

“Estelle, Estelle,” stammered Eric Lindsay.

“I am here, Eric,” she answered in a faint voice, and taking his helpless hand. “I am here, I am here.”

“Estelle—I am dying.”

“Oh, no,” she said, sobbingly. “No, dear Eric—you will not die. You are going to get better—”

He struggled for breath, for speech, his eyes rolling.

“Laurence—meeting—has killed me!” he muttered.

Hugh looked at his aunt. They both thought he was delirious.

“Laurence is dead, uncle. You were dreaming.”

“No, no, a lie—Laurence lives, Laurence is here.”

Again Hugh and his aunt exchanged glances.

“Be quiet, dear uncle,” said Hugh. “Do not worry. When you get well we will attend to everything.”

Uncle Eric waved his hand aimlessly in the

“Never—well—never, I tell you. Estelle—”

“Yes, dear?”

“The will—burn it. You know the will—eldest nephew—Laurence would inherit. Burn it, Estelle.”

“Yes, dear.”

“Upper right hand drawer. Get Banks—Banks. Maybe I can fix it yet. See Hugh gets everything, Estelle, see Hugh—”

The words trailed off into indistinct speech, the eyes closed once more. Hugh almost forced his aunt from the room again—and indeed out in the corridor lifted her in his strong arms and brought her to her own apartments. When he came back again, alone, he thought of Leigh. He made his way to the window-seat. She was crouching in it, her face white, her teeth chattering.

"Oh, you poor child!" he said, in pity. "I should have remembered you were here, but his sudden waking drove all things from my head. You heard him, Leigh?"

"Yes," she said, trembling.

"Do not think of what he said. It was but a fever-dream. And the sight has been too much for you—I was foolish to ask you to stay, dear—I see that now. Poor Leigh!"

* * * * *

When the physicians came they thought that Eric Lindsay's condition was worse than before. Yes; he had a good constitution, a fine, strong body, but—

That "but" spoke volumes. Again ensued weary days and weeks for all of them. Christmas came and went—and Hugh did not go home for the joyous festival. There was no joy in the Manor; nothing but suspense, nothing but waiting.

Aunt Estelle's character showed itself now from its best side. Sorrow, if it aged her, made her affectionate and sensible. She clung to Hugh and to Gertrude for support in this, her greatest trial. Leigh would not again enter the sick-room, nor was she permitted to do so, but she stayed often, for hours at a time, in Uncle Eric's dressing-room. This silent devotion touched her betrothed, who felt he had misjudged her.

These long visits ended one day very abruptly.

She had entered the room as usual and walked over to take her accustomed place at Uncle Eric's writing-desk. Suddenly she paused and glanced about her in a frightened way. On the table lay a small bunch of keys. It seemed hardly possible that this was her opportunity, lying here, waiting for her to stretch out her hand to take it.

In nervous fashion she wavered. Then she stole to the door and looked into the sick-room. Hugh was at his uncle's side, and there was no one in the corridor without. Leigh sat down carelessly in the chair and her fingers closed around the keys. Then holding them tight in her hand that they might not rattle, she tried key after key in the top drawer at the right hand side of the desk. It took her almost three-quarters of an hour to do

this and she was not interrupted. Not even a servant entered the room.

She was rewarded finally. The last key fitted. Then, with stealthy fingers, she slipped it off the ring and hid it in her bosom. Just as she finished doing this she looked up to see Hugh standing over her.

She did not lose her composure, having prepared herself for this contingency. She ran the keys through her fingers again, as if counting them. Then she put them back upon the desk carelessly.

“How is Uncle Eric now?” she asked.

“Just the same,” he replied. “Why, those are his keys—Aunt Estelle must have forgotten them. Will you take them to her, Leigh?”

She rose to do so. The key she had hidden in her bosom fell to the floor.

“This one must have come off,” said Hugh. “I will—”

“Why, no, that is mine,” she said, hastily. “It is the key of my *escriatoire*.”

“Oh, I beg your pardon.” He restored it to her and she left the room hurriedly.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DESPERATE DEED.

THE doctors were not mistaken when they told Hugh that the master of the Manor was in serious danger. He fought a good fight for his life, fought death inch by inch, but in the end death came.

It was a very quiet, peaceful death, and unexpected, so that even Aunt Estelle was not present. Only Hugh and Gertrude were in the room when the last breath left him, and it was Gertrude who held his hand in hers, and it was her tear-choked voice that sounded in his ears, reciting heartfelt prayers. When Aunt Estelle came it was all over. Eric Lindsay had left the home of his pride forever.

Once more, but with what different sensations now, Hugh made ready for the funeral of a Lindsay. He had really grown to care for the proud old man, and the knowledge that he loved and trusted him, without a suspicion of his disinterestedness, made his memory the tenderer. With genuine pain at his heart he saw the gray vault open to receive the form of the master who had restored the ancient glory of the Lindsays at such a cost to himself. Gertrude had kept up bravely to the very end, but they had to carry her to her own room when she got back to the Manor, and, a shattered, nervous little wreck, she was waited upon by the faithful Julie. Mrs. Fenton, with some hesitation, spoke to Hugh seriously of his and Leigh's marriage. She had no doubt but that Eric Lindsay had made all arrangements conducive to the future benefit of his heir. Hugh listened to her with conflicting emotions. It struck him that this good-looking lady

was rather in a hurry to have her daughter settled—and he did not like Mrs. Fenton. A cold smile played about his lips.

“That rests with Leigh,” he said. “It is for her to decide when we marry. I believe she said April.”

Which was a polite hint to her to attend strictly to her own affairs, but his tone was so strange that she failed to understand him. He was much hurt at her interference, and because he was a man of honor and a gentleman it hurt him also to confess that he had different feelings now concerning that marriage which he had anticipated as the consummation of all earthly joy.

When she went to Leigh with some similar speech on her lips the girl turned on her with a passion that fairly awed her, and said many things which did not sound well from a daughter to her mother. Waking, sleeping, the face of Laurence Lindsay, whom she had known as Allan Fraser, was ever before her. Her daily thoughts were with him and of him. Uncle Eric’s disconnected speech had been the clew to his whereabouts. To think that he had come—had been under the one roof with her, who loved him so! And she had not known it—it was enough to madden her!

Within her brain a plan was forming. She knew that Laurence, though he had not been heard of since that fatal day, was somewhere in the vicinity. And she, who had heard the old man’s words, knew that she could help him to his inheritance. She did not trust her betrothed to leave untouched the will in the right-hand drawer. Every one knew it was no fever-dream now; every one had heard that the graceless nephew had returned, and that it was after the scene with him that Uncle Eric had been stricken. Aunt Estelle would listen to no extenuating circumstances. She would not heed Hugh’s words that her husband had been long ailing—none of this could move her from the protestation that Laurence had killed him. But Laurence did not intrude upon any one of them, and Leigh, at her wits’ end to see him, conceived the plan of following Mildred—for did she not know of the girl’s hidden love, and would a woman not seek her lover? Yet even the closest surveillance availed her nothing, and when she did at last see him, it was purely accidental. She looked up from

the arbor in which she sat, to find him standing not ten feet away from her. With a joyous exclamation on her lips she rose to go to him, but just then Mildred came swiftly along the path, put her hand within his arm, and he, bending over her in almost lover-like fashion, it seemed to the watching Leigh, they walked away together. Full of anger, she looked after them—then she laughed at her own folly. He had loved her once—did this creature think to step in between them? Little did she know Leigh Fenton's power. No other could do what she was prepared to do for him. No other knew of the existing will save the two—her lover and his aunt—to whose interests it was to keep it well concealed. No. She would take what risks there came. Once let her go to him with the papers in her hand that proved his right to the Manor of Lindsay and the Lindsay wealth, once let her meet his glance as of old, and Mildred could whistle for the man whom she thought to make her own by the power of sympathy.

But was Mildred disinterested? She began to reason with the suspiciousness of her narrow nature. What if Mildred knew, and would forestall her? Oh, it was impossible! Only she knew, and Aunt Estelle and the one who thought she was going to marry him. Marry him! What a fool she had been to even imagine she could care for that staid and steady fellow, so serious, so honest, so faultless, such a prig! She was glad things were turning out this way. Laurence Lindsay would make a much better master of the Manor than the man who thought to succeed to Uncle Eric's shoes.

The day of Uncle Eric's burial had been gloomy and overcast—the rain poured down as if the heavens opened. But on this, the morning after, there was every indication of better weather. This day-dawn was to bring the great undertaking which Leigh had resolved on. She rose and dressed herself, feeling, as she did so, for the little steel key that had never left her throat since the day she had secured it. She was really excitable and nervous of temperament, and the thought that she must enter the rooms of the dead master of Lindsay, to frustrate the dearest desire of his heart, made her tremble. She stood at her window. The heavy

gray mist of early dawn showed the landscape vague and undecided; then a soft red tinted the horizon, and objects began to assume form and color from the slowly rising orb of day. She surely was safe. No one in all that tired household could be awake now. She would steal in softly. It would occupy but one moment to open the drawer, take the paper, and vanish.

Her rooms, which communicated with her mother's, were on the same floor as Eric Lindsay's, with Aunt Estelle's on the other side. It hardly seemed possible that the widow had left the door adjoining her dead husband's open. Then Leigh remembered that she had gone to sleep with Mildred. Another fear assailed her. Perhaps the door was locked. In that case she would have to retrace her steps, go out on the narrow stone portico that ran the entire side of the house, and gain access to the apartment by the window.

One can realize how desperately resolved she was on this plan when one thinks of the possible chances of discovery. Only the boldest attempt could meet with success—there was no time for vacillation or for hesitancy. Either she must go, take the risks, or else all would fail—there was no other way. Failure meant the dashing of her dearest hopes. She set her teeth, with a strange determination on the lovely features, and turned to her door, opened it, and on tiptoes stole along the corridor to Uncle Eric's room. She twisted the knob—the door was unlocked. So far fortune had favored her.

Only one thing now she must guard against—her own treacherous nerves. Trembling violently, she stood on the threshold, entered, closed the door, hurried to the desk. She kept her eyes upon it. Her fingers could scarcely hold the key, they were shaking so. She must not lose control of herself now—one second, just one, and all would be accomplished. Her eyes were glued to that desk—she saw no other object but that in the whole room. She dared not trust herself to see another object.

"The top drawer to the right, the top drawer to the right," she murmured faintly, trying to steel her nerves to courage by the sound of her own voice. She fumbled at it, inserted the key

in the lock. There, on the very top, was a long, legal-looking document. It was the will, without a doubt. She clutched at it with eager fingers and had just closed the drawer when a hand grasped her own and the paper was taken from her.

“Leigh!” said a stern voice. “Leigh! What are you doing here?”

Too frightened to speak, to scream, she looked up, and in the gray dawn of the morning saw Hugh, her betrothed.

* * * * *

He had been unable to sleep, for painful thoughts tortured him. There was much to be done, much to be settled, before he left for home. Nor could he decide his future course until he saw Aunt Estelle. He knew as well as she did what his uncle's wishes were, but the question of right and of wrong confronted him. By every impulse of Uncle Eric's heart this last few months, he knew that the Manor was intended for his own. But his notions were quixotic. There was the will—the unchanged will—the will, that, since Laurence was alive, made him, as the eldest nephew, the owner of Lindsay.

He came down the stairs slowly, with these thoughts filling him. As he passed, he was surprised to notice that Uncle Eric's door was open. He walked over to it, and pushing it gently, looked into the room. At the desk he saw a woman's figure.

At first he had a vague idea that it was Aunt Estelle, come, ere the house was stirring, to fulfil her husband's last desire. But she must listen to him first before she did this thing, he must explain to her—

When he approached and recognized Leigh his heart almost stood still.

She fell away from him, and would have sunk to the ground had it not been for the nervous grasp she made at the edge of the desk. She stared at him with great dark eyes, every vestige of color stricken from lips and face. Such a ghastly white countenance it was, as if she had been suddenly deprived of life. He felt sorry for her—he had never seen a woman look like that.

“What is the matter?” he asked. “What is the matter with

you? And what brought you here—here, of all places in the world?"

"I heard your uncle—about Laurence—the will!" she muttered, as if the words were forced from her.

"You, Leigh? You heard? Yes; I remember. And you came—for what? You came—"

He staggered back, glancing from the paper in his hand to her white face. A sudden light seemed to dawn on him. "You came to destroy the papers that stood between me and Lindsay!" he exclaimed. "For love of me, Leigh? Come, come to your senses, child, and answer me!"

So. He thought she was here for his sake! Would she keep him in that belief? Let him think that it was for his sake that she had come—to help him to Lindsay and its wealth? She could then go back to her own room, and he, sure of her fealty and devotion, would destroy the will alone. Ah, she would tell him the truth—that it was for Laurence—for Laurence, whom she loved—.

Hugh misunderstood her silence. He felt suddenly very tender toward her. She might be faulty and headstrong and wilful, but she could love enough to do this desperate deed. There was hope for that future which he had learned to dread, for if she really cared— Ah, God, teach him how to deal with this girl who was giving her life into his keeping!

"My poor Leigh," he said, "don't you understand that—"

"Oh, spare me," she cried, in a tense voice. "Spare me—I have had enough of you—of your moral remarks and of your preaching. I am sick to death of them all! You would flatter yourself that I came here for your sake? I wanted to return that paper to its rightful owner!"

Open-mouthed, he stared at her.

"Return this—to its owner!" He could say no more. A sickening feeling passed over him. Then he drew himself together with a short laugh. "Oh, what belief you have in my morality, my sense of right! So you do not know me well enough to feel that I would never stoop to dishonor? My God, so little

do you believe in me? And I trusted you, Leigh—I trusted you as I trusted my own soul. Oh, Leigh, Leigh, what have I done, how have I failed, that you should doubt me like this!"

The pain in his tones fell on deaf ears.

"Doubt you? Doubt you! I tell you I will not, did not, do not think of *you*!" she cried. "I am not considering *you* at all!"

"Leigh, this stranger—"

"Stranger!" Her dark eyes flamed, her tender body shook with excitement. "Stranger! It is Allan Fraser of whom you are speaking—Allan Fraser!"

"Fraser!" he echoed, stupidly. He thought the girl had gone insane, and could only stare at her. "Will you try to tell me just what you mean, if you can?"

"Oh, I can," she retorted. "Do you remember the connection between Fraser and Laurence Lindsay? Do you remember Uncle Lewis and the night he told us of the violinist—of the concert after which the Italians carried him home on their shoulders? Of the applause that was bestowed on him? Laurence Lindsay never died—never. Allan Fraser died, and Laurence took his name, and it was as Allan Fraser that I met him and that I loved him."

Hugh's teeth snapped together viciously. He was not in a mood to be trifled with then. The slow anger of his nature stirred within him, raged within him, beat at his brain. He grasped her arm.

"Go on, go on," he said, hoarsely. "Go on, I tell you!"

She blushed crimson. She did not feel the fierceness of his fingers, she did not know that he was desperate. The spell of that one sweet, thrilling time of her life was with her, overpowering her.

"Love awakens love," she answered, softly. He released her, pushing her away from him.

"Not always," he said, bitterly. "So you loved him, and he loved you? How touching! And what or who came between your united hearts?"

She pretended not to notice the sneer on his face. She even tried to speak with some of her usual lightness.

"Money," she said, airily. "Money, of course—and my mother and my father and my uncle. They painted the future for me in no undecided hues. They frightened me. I could not live in poverty."

"Not even for love's sweet sake?" There was mockery in his tone. "And I was the next eligible newcomer? Oh, what a farce you are—"

"Almost three years lay between that time and when I met you," she said, on the defensive now. "I told myself it was all past and gone. I liked you at first very much, and it was quite a temptation to take you away from that girl who has always hated me. You reminded me of Allan—of Allan whom I have always loved, and I thought, in time, I might grow to care for you. I deceived myself. You were too unlike me—you and your mother and your people lived in a different world to the gay, bright, sweet world that I know—the joyous world, where people are less holy and more entertaining! You have never supplanted Allan in my heart—and you never will, never, never. When Uncle Lewis spoke of him that night I knew the truth—that though I were engaged to you a hundred times he would always come first with me. When I saw the famous picture of Laurence Lindsay, when I heard that the disgraced nephew had been so great a violinist, I saw it all in a flash. I do not know how these things have happened. I only know that he is here—near me. I have seen him with my own eyes—the rightful owner of the Lindsay wealth, homeless in his own home. I wanted mine to be the hand that should restore it to him—I wanted him to realize that my love for him could never die. To realize that he and he alone was the possessor of Leigh Fenton's heart."

The slow, insolent voice ceased. Hugh had had a chance to rally from the first great shock. He gazed upon her now as a creature apart from him. What vanity he possessed was sorely wounded, but even in this moment of its falling the thunderbolt seemed shorn of its strength.

"What love is it that descends to thievery?" he asked. "What love is that that reaches to its aim regardless of its faithlessness toward another? Had you but come to me—"

"Faithlessness!" she cried, stung by his remarks. "To whom was I faithless? To you? No—for I never was yours really—I never in my heart cared for you. And even now what harm can my defection do such a nature as yours? What do you know of true love, the love of which poets sing? Nothing. You are too phlegmatic."

Hugh looked at the girl whom he had thought he had loved with all the fervor of his heart. One by one she had torn from his clasp every illusion he had cherished. One by one she had destroyed the sweetness of the sentiments existing in his deep-souled nature. He was numb and cold, but conscious of a great relief. She stood before him in all her beauty, glowing, warm, and he knew now why those doubts, those misgivings had tortured him. It was because they had ever been strangers to each other. That he had known her outer semblance and she his, but that below the surface there was no insight. He recalled his past dream of happiness with her as one looks back on the memory of a blissful childhood. He wondered what her future was to be, unprincipled, untruthful, passionate—friendless when her beauty left her, for her beauty was all her possession. Without honor and without God—what was to become of her in the darkness of that future which every human soul must know?

"Let us part in peace, Leigh," he said, slowly. "Let us part in peace, girl—for we say farewell to each other here this morning. From now on our lives lie far apart."

She bowed frigidly, and drew the ring he had given her from her finger.

"Of what has passed between us I shall never speak," he went on, in that steady voice. "You can say you have given me back your troth—that is the woman's privilege. That God may protect you, Leigh, is my earnest prayer—for if ever a being needs His protection I think you do. For one short while you were very dear to me."

"I am glad you look at it in so calm a light. I have thought for some time that your affection had cooled—"

"No reproaches, Leigh. I think I have been the worst used of the two. You brought me great joy—and I do not grudge the pain. It will not last long—and for that I thank you. Let us part without ill-feeling."

She walked to the door hesitatingly.

"Laurence—you will—"

"Do as honor and right command me," was his answer. "Try to think that I, at least, have a conscience. Again, God protect you, Leigh."

And so they parted.

* * * * *

He sank into his uncle's chair, before his uncle's desk, to think over this last hour. He had suffered, he told himself, but it was not all pain, this feeling at his heart. The beautiful creature who had just left him was not the girl to whom he could have clung until death separated them—yes, and even afterward in the brightness of God's perfect day.

"Ask yourself if she will bear with you the bad hours that come into every man's life," his mother had written. Oh, bitterly indeed had he realized of late that he must bear what bad hours came to him—alone.

He knew that Lindsay Manor was forever lost to him, but he faced that prospect unflinchingly now. He would cut loose from this life, this unreal world into which he had wandered. There was not a single memory he wished to carry away with him—not a single face—

Not one? Could he leave the Manor and Lindsay forever and sink all and everything he had known and experienced there into oblivion? He went over them: Aunt Estelle—she would soon forget him. He was nothing to Mildred. He was nothing to the servants who called him master. He was nothing to the cousin who would come to reign here in his place. Yet he had been glad that the old home was to be his, that he was to be its possessor, that at the end of the long hall with the rose window he could

build a chapel, and bring the old, forgotten faith back to the Lindsay line. It had been a sweet thought.

He shook himself slightly. It was all past and gone. Those tender dreams—

And then there seemed to come before him a little, wistful, pale face—a frightened little face, with great, deer-like brown eyes, and soft bronze curls clinging to blue-veined temples. He seemed to see the infinite trust on that countenance raised to his, he listened for the words he almost felt would issue in another moment from the parted lips.

Ah, no; he could not forget Gertrude. There was one memory of Lindsay he could never wish to banish from his mind, there was one face he would carry with him in tenderness of heart, always.

He gathered up the papers that lay in the drawer—all relating to Laurence as he knew, and, with the will, bestowed them in an inner pocket. He was determined that no harm should befall them until they went into Laurence Lindsay's hands.

Then, as if treading on a long-forgotten grave, with downbent head and weary form, Hugh Lindsay left his uncle's room.

CHAPTER XX.

“THE FORTUNES OF WAR.”

As soon as he reached his own apartments Hugh took out the papers again and laid them on the little table. He understood now that Allan Fraser and Laurence Lindsay were one and the same person. It showed the noble heart of the man, that thinking of Leigh's assertion that Laurence cared for her and probably still did so, he remembered also Mildred Powell's faithful, single-hearted devotion to the one she had loved so long. The future might bring her much misery, he thought—at least what satisfaction he could give her now would be hers. So he sat down and wrote a note to her.

“I have kept the will which leaves the eldest nephew of Eric Lindsay the Manor and all it contains. Herewith I send you the papers that prove Laurence Lindsay's right to his name and place. The will I intend giving to Mr. Banks when he comes this afternoon. You will probably see my cousin before I do, and it is fitting that he should hear, from the lips of so faithful a friend as you have been, first news of the good fortune awaiting him. The Manor is his now, and tell him that no one will welcome him more gladly than his cousin, Hugh Lindsay.”

He slipped the package to the girl when she left the breakfast table, then asked his aunt to wait, as he wished to speak to her.

“Miss Fenton has broken her engagement to me,” he said, shortly.

To his surprise she looked at him pityingly, without expression of wonder or astonishment.

“Poor Hugh!” she said. “I saw it coming a long time ago. Poor Hugh! Now I understand the contents of this note.”

She handed him a perfumed missive that Mrs. Fenton had sent to her room, telling her that she and Leigh would breakfast together, as they intended leaving that afternoon, instead of the evening, and there was much to be done. She would go to her "dear friend" before her departure and communicate to her some news of importance. Hugh handed back the note and looked at her.

"You know, of course, Aunt Estelle, that I hold Uncle Eric's will—I shall give it to Mr. Banks when he comes."

Now indeed the good woman was astonished.

"Give it to Banks, Hugh—"

"There is nothing to be said, aunt. We can not destroy that document. We have to take the consequences of its existence."

"But Hugh, Eric said—"

"Think it over, aunt. You'll see it the way I do before this evening." He slipped quickly out of the room, for he did not want to listen to the protests and pleadings he knew she would shower upon him. Gertrude was coming, wan and large-eyed, down the broad staircase as he passed out into the hall. He watched the slow movements of the slight little figure that had been so full of life and vitality so short a while ago.

"Hello, cousin!" he said, cheerily. "Have you had breakfast?"

"In my room, thank you," she returned. "I have had an awful night, Hugh, and I am so tired of that room—so tired and sick of it."

"You should have slept well last night of all nights—you are exhausted," he said. "Do you know what I'd like to do with you? Pick you up and put you out in the sunshine—you're like some poor little wilted blossom."

"Lend me your arm and let me walk out there," she answered.

"I have much to say to you," said Hugh as they stood together on the graveled path. "But first I have a question to ask you."

"Well, Hugh?"

"Which would you rather be—wealthy, knowing that if you

had not wronged, you had at least injured another, or remain poor with clean hands?"

The sunlight glinted in her eyes.

"Things have come to a pretty pass when you can ask me such a question, Hugh," quietly. "Or do you ask it to try me? There is no choice."

"Thank you. I wonder why I did ask you."

"I wonder also."

"I suppose because I am the one concerned," he answered. "Uncle Eric left a will in favor of his eldest nephew—and that eldest nephew is Laurence Lindsay."

"Oh, *Hugh!*" she said. "Oh, my poor Hugh!"

"This is the end for me, Gertrude. Dear old Lindsay! Do you know, I had grown quite to love it."

"And Leigh," she asked, half-fearfully. "What of Leigh?"

"Leigh has given me back her troth. Not because of money," he went on, hastily, anxious to do her justice—perhaps even too anxious, for he felt guilty that he did not feel more regret over her loss. "But because she never loved me—because she has always loved Laurence Lindsay, whom she knew first as Allan Fraser."

Two red spots glowed in Gertrude's cheeks.

"So she always loved Laurence—*always?*" with a scorn she could not repress. "Has she ever told you that she drove Harold Lindsay— Well, never mind now. I have no right to tell you that."

Her face was crimson; she turned and would have fled from him, but he held her back.

"What is it?" he asked. "Go on, Gertrude. It will not hurt me to hear it."

"Will not hurt you? Is that true?" curiously. "Have you forgotten what she was to be to you—so soon?"

"No," he answered. "No; I have not forgotten. I loved Leigh Fenton, deeply and fervently, but I have known for a long, long time that our natures were not in sympathy. Perhaps that has taken the worst edge off her refusal to marry me."

"And may still further soften it when you hear what I have to tell you," said Gertrude. "I am the only one at Lindsay who knows it, Hugh. Poor Harry met Leigh once when he went to see his mother at Kentboro. She never cared much about him, but she was one to flatter a man, and she played with him as a cat plays with a mouse. It went so far that Harold asked her to marry him. She laughed. Her mother and she were leaving then for foreign parts, and she told him—actually told him—that she had been merely practising on him! Practising on a man's tenderest feelings! I remember well the day that he came home. He was almost crazy with rage and despair. I was a child, no one ever paid any attention to me then. I was in the little morning-room alone when he came in, and he frightened me so. He grasped me by the shoulders, and shoving me down into a chair, asked me why I was a woman, why children like me should grow up to torture men the way women do. I think he was mad for those few minutes. When he finally talked the worst of it away, he saw that he had to take me into his confidence. He did so. I was so sorry—sorry for him all through," she sighed, "but I could do nothing, and I was so wicked then myself that I don't know how he could ever have trusted me. Uncle Eric never knew the truth. That was why he went so out of bounds after—and was so wild. He even married a nice little girl at Kentboro, who truly cared for him. Poor thing, I have often stolen out to see her, but Uncle Eric never knew. And when the end came and I saw his body carried in, my heart did ache for him. And I prayed for him, and asked God not to put his death at Leigh Fenton's door."

She was looking up at him earnestly. A great thankfulness had stolen into his face.

"God has been very good to me," he said, simply.

"Yes," said Gertrude. "When I saw her with you, at first I feared that the same thing would occur as with poor Harold. Then, when she had promised to marry you I did not feel so badly, because I thought that she had not cared for Harold, and had really grown to care for you. I was glad, for it seemed a pity that so beautiful a girl could be altogether heartless. And now—"

"And now," he echoed slowly. "And now—"

The gaze he bent upon her sent the blood rushing to her forehead again. She took her hand from his arm and turned toward the house. He turned with her, but she stopped short and looked at him, her straight black brows arched imperiously, almost in anger.

"I go alone," she said, coldly.

* * * * *

Mrs. Fenton was not a little frightened when Leigh came into her room, woke her without ceremony, and told her that the engagement to Hugh Lindsay was broken off, and that they must leave the Manor immediately. Used to yielding to her imperious daughter's will, she gave in once more. It did not come so much as a surprise—she had always felt in her secret heart that something would happen to prevent this marriage. Leigh's tale of Laurence and Fraser only confused her. She turned a deaf ear to the story, and set about her packing at once with the tears streaming down her face. One comment she made, however:

"It is said that between two stools one falls to the ground. Let us hear no more of your future prospects. What your father will say to me—"

Leigh smiled loftily. She knew what her father was quite well—her father and she understood each other. She couldn't marry a penniless Lindsay when there was a chance of marrying a rich Lindsay, could she? All this she said to her mother, and more, too, and much, until for very peace's sake Mrs. Fenton kept quiet.

In her own heart Leigh was confident that one look, one touch of her hand, would bring the whilom Allan Fraser to her feet again. So she assumed her haughtiest expression, and moved about the rooms with such a queenly air that the servants—wise creatures, from whom nothing can be hidden!—concluded that indeed she had never cared for Mr. Hugh. One thing, however, was troubling Leigh. She must see Laurence—see him before she left the Manor. But how? And where?

Mrs. Lindsay entered the rooms of her departing guests,

There was a marked change in her behavior. The warmth of manner due to the Fentons as future connections was no longer necessary, and she was glad now to draw the line, and to treat them with the coldness she had felt of late toward them. It galled Mrs. Fenton, who could, however, do nothing but endure it. After a few well-expressed words of regret, Mrs. Lindsay left them, saying that Mildred, who had gone for a little walk, would return in time to bid them farewell.

"Do you know which way she went?" asked Leigh, graciously, for the words had given her a clew. What more natural than that she had gone to Laurence? "I should like to follow her—perhaps we can stroll together for the last time over this dear old place."

Aunt Estelle was not to be impressed by sentiment. No; she didn't know which way Mildred had gone. To the bridge, probably—that was her favorite resort. She thought Mildred preferred being alone, she felt so badly, etc. Leigh smiled. She would go to the bridge and see if dear Mildred was there. Even before Aunt Estelle had finished her brief conversation Leigh had vanished, so anxious was she to find her dear Mildred, and to walk with her. She knew the way quite well. After all, what was Mildred but a friend at court, to whom Laurence's heart, in its loneliness, eagerly turned? But when *she* came! With tender words on her lips, and good news for him, with love in her eyes and promise of the future!

She made her way swiftly to the bridge—cautiously, as the road that led to the brook widened. Right here a little path branched off through thick woods and bushes. Into this she slipped, for she suddenly heard the sound of voices. She parted the tangle of vines and peeped through, then remained as if rooted to the spot.

On the bench sat Mildred and Laurence Lindsay. Leigh's heart bounded at sight of the handsome, dark countenance with its well-remembered melancholy expression, the glowing eyes, with the fire in their depths. Mildred sat with happy face upturned to his, young and sweet and girlish in her joy. The papers were

spread out on her lap, and she had just given him Hugh's note to read.

"What a noble fellow he must be!" said Laurence with a sigh. "Ah, Mildred, he would make Lindsay a better master than I. What a wasted, embittered life is mine! And to think that, in the end, I should be the murderer of him who was my benefactor! I followed his body as it was carried along yesterday, followed it in secret, slinking after it as if I were a dog. And when they had gone home—all of them—I knelt outside the gray stone vault and prayed that God might have mercy on my uncle's soul—might have mercy on me."

"Prayed, Laurence?" in quick wonder.

"Yes, prayed. I am a Catholic now—I have been a Catholic four months, Mildred."

"Lindsay will have one of the old religion for a master after all, then," she said, slowly. "That was the only thing about Hugh Uncle Eric didn't like."

"Well, dear, he would not have liked it in me, either, but facts are facts." He put his hand over hers and spoke tenderly. "You have been my good genius. You have believed in me when no one else did—you have brought to the surface what manhood there was in me. Mildred, will you share my future now? Will you link your life to mine? When I came back, when I saw you that first time, I dared not offer you the heart of a penitent suppliant at your gates. But now, I ask you, Mildred, will you marry me? Be my guiding star. Take my weak soul, my will, my heart, into your keeping, and help me, help me to be a better man!"

She had waited long for these words, and now that they came, she was speechless. But her eyes met his. The love of her whole strong nature spoke from them, and he knew that she consented. He bent to press his lips to hers, satisfied with that silent glance. But as he did so he heard footsteps along the path and he raised his head to meet Leigh Fenton's mocking gaze.

Mildred started from his embrace, coloring a deep crimson. Still Leigh Fenton stood, and the scorn in her eyes traveled to

her red lips. It stung Mildred's pride, it roused her to action. Without a word she rose to her feet, laid the papers beside her lover on the bench, and with bent head left the two together.

* * * * *

"I salute you!" said Leigh, coming forward when Mildred was well out of sight and hearing. "I salute you, Laurence Lindsay of Lindsay Manor!"

All the daring of her untamed nature spoke from her lovely, glowing face. He leaned back with a look that filled her with wild desire to prove her power. She moved toward him with the lithe grace of a panther in her beautiful, sensuous body.

"I thank you for the salutation, Leigh Fenton of Fenton in Kentboro," he returned in kind.

"So we see each other again?" she asked, her eyes fastened on him, her voice low and dangerously sweet.

"Life is full of surprises," he said.

"When we parted in Rome," she went on, "I did not foresee this meeting. Did you?"

"Oh, I knew we should meet again—where or how of course I had no way of telling," he answered, coldly.

"And to see you making love to that—to Mildred Powell—well, you surprised me—Allan."

She was putting forth all her fascination. He had loved her once; he could not help looking at her now with a warm light on his face, for she was rarely beautiful at that moment.

"And to hear of you as the betrothed wife of another—well, you surprised me, Miss Fenton."

He had cut for cut. She came to him and sat beside him, closing her white fingers around the hand that hung carelessly over the back of the bench, looking at him with appeal on her face.

"Only listen to me," she said. "You think you owe your good fortune to Hugh Lindsay, or to Mildred Powell? Do you really think so? Let me tell you that I was in the room when your uncle, with almost his dying breath, made his wife and Hugh promise to burn that will. I, myself, went to the desk this morning to get that will for you, the will that leaves everything

to your uncle's eldest nephew. I meant to bring you your rights with my own hands because—because I could not forget the past," and her voice was low and alluring. "It was through me Hugh found himself forced to do you justice. It is through me the Manor is yours. Believe me and believe in me, for the sake of dear old times," she ended, very tenderly.

He sat still, looking at her, at the lovely eyes, the scarlet lips, the blushing face.

"I believe in you," he said, slowly. "I believe in you, Leigh Fenton, for I know you, but I wonder—" he smiled, and his handsome lip curled—"but I wonder if you are telling me the truth. Well, never mind. I am more than thankful that you tried to do so much for me. I shall always appreciate it."

"And—that—is—all!"

"That is all, Leigh. As the betrothed of Hugh Lindsay I have no right to say anything else to you. As—"

"Hugh and I have broken off our engagement—"

He put up his hand.

"Pardon me, let me finish. Mildred Powell has just given me her promise to become my wife," he said, quickly. "Let us forget the past—forget that once we swore eternal vows. Let us be friends."

"Friends!" she laughed, mockingly. "Oh, you fool! Do you think I want your friendship—do you, do you?"

He was silent. She looked at the watch hanging from her belt.

"My mother and I are leaving for Kentboro within the hour," she said. "Permit me to bid you good-by here and now. I have but one wish—may we never meet again!"

He bowed. Her eyes were blazing as she turned from him and walked swiftly from the scene of the bitterest humiliation she had ever experienced, toward the Manor. He followed her more slowly. Her words had given him food for thought indeed. His eyes, too, were lighted with a strange fire, his whole face seemed as if he were suddenly ennobled. As he came in sight of the Manor he straightened his broad shoulders and walked with proud, erect

head and firm step toward it. Mildred's watchful gaze was on him, and as he reached the door she came to meet him. There was a look of perfect trust on her calm face. It was a look that seemed to give him strength.

"Mildred!" he said to her, his breath coming fast. "Mildred, whom did you promise to marry—the vagabond, or the heir of the Manor?"

She was startled, but she did not hesitate a second.

"I promised to marry the man I love," she said. "Is he the man who loves me?"

"Always, from now on, and forever, so help me God."

His earnestness stirred her very soul. It was a moment too deep for speech. Then he put his hands on her shoulders and bent his eyes to hers.

"Go to Hugh Lindsay and ask him to come to see me—his Cousin Laurence. I will be waiting for him in the drawing-room. Tell him that I am devoured by curiosity to see that will of Uncle Eric's—that I wish he would bring it to me. And do you come, too, Mildred—there is nothing now, in my life, from which you can be separated."

When Mildred tapped at Hugh's door, and delivered Laurence's message, the young man wondered at curiosity so ill-timed. But he took up the will at once, and, Mildred preceding, went gravely down to where the new master of the Manor waited. Laurence was standing before the fire that burned in the open hearth, for the dampness of yesterday's rain made a fire necessary in the long room. As Hugh came in he paused, and the glances of blue eyes and black eyes met. They stood measuring each other as men do, then Laurence stepped forward in greeting, and Hugh grasped his extended hand.

"The fortunes of war!" said Laurence. "Can you forgive me, Cousin Hugh?"

"Freely, honestly," said the younger man, cordially. "There are things above wealth in this world, Laurence."

"Thank you—so I have proved. Will you let me see that famous will? It may seem unnatural to wish to handle it, but

I love Lindsay so that I can scarcely wait to hear the words that will give it to me."

Hugh handed him the folded parchment sheet. Laurence took it in both outstretched palms. A great whiteness had shut down over his face, an awe, as if he were afraid.

"The seal will not be broken, of course, until Mr. Banks arrives. We expect him at any moment now," said Hugh, smiling a little, and his smile was not unmixed with contempt.

"Of course." Laurence gazed curiously into his cousin's face. "Hugh, isn't your heart breaking to lose this glorious home of ours—to have another come in and reign where you thought to be master?"

"No," answered Hugh, frankly. "No; it is not. I like this old place—the home of our fathers—affection for it has grown upon me—but I have no such craving—"

"God!" cried Laurence Lindsay in a voice that shook with passion. "God, how you tempt me—for I love it so! Every stone in it I could press to my lips—every tree in it is dear to me. The very air I breathe here is purer, sweeter, fresher. It is home, home, home—and only here is my heart at rest!"

Hugh looked at him gently.

"I am glad for your sake that you will have it, Laurence—"

"Hear me out, cousin. Long ago I left here with a bitter heart, resolved to shake its dust forever from my feet. But I could not. I had to come back—the Lindsay curse was on me. I came to Uncle Eric. I pleaded with him. He spurned me. I asked him to prove my penitence. He offered me money. That interview with me killed him—"

"He was sick—had been ailing for a long time—"

"I know all about that. Nevertheless, I told him I was sorry. How can I prove it? By carrying out his wishes. What were his wishes? That you would be master here. And by heaven, master you shall be, though it break my heart."

He turned, and bending, laid the parchment on the blazing logs. Hugh stared at him—and gave a lunge forward.

"You madman!" he cried. "You fool!"

"Both in the past, Cousin Hugh," with a reckless laugh. "Fool and madman, ingrate and spendthrift—but honest, thank God, for the first time in my life. Mildred—"

He opened his arms wide to her and she came to him with a little sob and clasped her two hands about his neck, clinging to him.

"My hero, my king!" she said. "Oh, Laurence, my hero, my king!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A HEART'S DESIRE.

Too stunned to move hand or foot, Hugh Lindsay stood staring at his cousin and at Mildred, who were oblivious of his presence. He could not realize what Laurence had just done in the surprise of seeing him and Mildred so happily understanding each other. Then, awaking quickly to the full knowledge of Laurence's rash act, he sprang forward. But the parchment was in flames. Even as he bent to look, the curling black cinder left of it was drawn lightly up the chimney.

"What have you done! What have you done!" cried Hugh.
"You have destroyed your only chance of inheritance—"

"I have carried out my uncle's dying wish."

"You have laid yourself liable to the penalty of the law—you can be imprisoned—"

"I have done as my uncle would have me do," said Laurence, steadily. "Can't you understand, cousin? Would you have taken the Manor if you had been placed in my position?"

"That is different. I am of different temperament. We are not alike—"

"One code of honor for all the Lindsays," said Laurence, "though God knows I have never kept my code. But with His help, and with the help of this pure girl, who has promised to make me happy by the gift of her own sweet self—the purest, truest friend man ever had—I shall make my future not unbecoming one of my race, one of my creed—*our* creed, Cousin Hugh."

Hugh stared at him again, his eyes glowing.

"Laurence Lindsay," he said. "Laurence Lindsay, I gave

you my hand in greeting as your cousin and kinsman—will you take it now from man to man?"

Their hands went out, met, clasped, shook. Eye met eye, and in that silent pressure, that long glance, they sealed a friendship that lasted all their years. And while they were standing so, the door opened and Aunt Estelle entered.

"Mr. Banks is here, Hugh," she said. "Will you come now—Ah!" as her eyes rested on Laurence and on Mildred standing close to him, his arm about her waist. "Ah! So—Mr.—Laurence Lindsay—has—come—home!"

No words could describe the disgust, the contempt in Aunt Estelle's voice. Some of the old deviltry leaped into the handsome dark countenance, for their natures had ever clashed.

"Laurence Lindsay, the vagabond, the prodigal, at your service, aunt!"

She flushed and looked at Mildred, her face hard and cold.

"You are kin to me," she said. "You have my blood in your veins, Mildred Powell, and I insist—"

"Aunt!" said Hugh. "Aunt Estelle, one word before you say things for which you may be sorry. Aunt Estelle, you loved my uncle. I am sure you loved him truly. Well, even so does Mildred love your nephew—wait, wait, hear me! Your nephew, in order to carry out his uncle's wishes, has done the most heroic deed of which a man in his position could be capable. He has burned the will that gave him Lindsay."

"Burned the will!" said Aunt Estelle. Then she looked from Laurence to Hugh and back again. "I don't believe it."

"Ah, but you must, since it is true. You knew we could not in conscience touch that document—the one that gave to Uncle Eric's eldest nephew all his wealth. But Laurence would not have it so. Regardless of consequences, he has destroyed it for Uncle Eric's sake. Aunt Estelle, it was a stupendous sacrifice—it merits your deepest respect."

He spoke warmly, and as his tones vibrated through the room his aunt wavered. The expression of Laurence's face changed—he approached nearer to her. They had not been friends in the

old days ever, but now, in this moment of self-effacement, his heart turned to her and she met him half-way. Perhaps, rising to the height of sacrifice, he saw things differently, and saw, too, with clearer vision, the defects of his past life. The realization of the last was coming home to him every moment, not alone because of the unselfish spirit of the girl who had loved him and who loved him still, but because of his new-found faith—almost too new and too strange to him yet to apply it to his daily deeds.

"Mr. Banks is waiting," said Aunt Estelle. "Let us go to him and tell him all. This means, of course, that since there is no will everything comes to me. Is that it, Hugh?"

"That is it, Aunt Estelle—and we must do our best to keep evil consequences from Laurence. There may be many complications because of this—"

"I am willing to shoulder everything," put in Laurence, quickly. "Do not worry about me, Hugh, or Aunt Estelle. I am really happy. I thought that when I once gave up Lindsay my heart would break. It is just the reverse—this feeling I have now."

When they came to the library, however, the strange exaltation that the last half-hour had brought to his face left it, and a melancholy expression settled upon it. He remembered his last visit to this room and he stood just inside the door, looking about him in silence. He could not bear the sight of the leather chair, for he thought how he had turned, blinded with tears, to gaze for the last time on Uncle Eric's bowed, gray head. A sob broke from him. To Gertrude also, who followed him, this room spoke powerfully—for it was in this room that she and Uncle Eric had held speech together and looked into each other's souls.

It was Hugh's now to take the lead to try to tell Mr. Banks, in as softened words as possible, what Laurence had done. The lawyer listened with unmoved face. In his line of business there was no room for surprises, nor was there a single possibility that he would commend Laurence's unheard-of act. He drew his grizzled brows together when Hugh had finished his explanation. Somehow Hugh pleased this grim old man better than any of

the Lindsays, even old Eric himself, though they had been life-long friends. Then he turned to the polished table and opened the flat leather portfolio lying upon it.

"I do not know what streak of forgetfulness disturbed my lamented client's brain when he was suffering from his last illness—at such times a man as old as he might be privileged to forget. But his second will was made by him in Kentboro, where I met him by appointment six weeks after Mr. Hugh Lindsay's engagement to Miss Leigh Fenton."

"A will!" cried Hugh, aghast. The others crowded about him, as much astonished as himself. All eyes were fastened on the lawyer's unmoved face.

"I shall proceed to read it to you now," said Mr. Banks, in his cold, incisive voice. "In it he revoked all former wills ever made by him. Mr. Laurence Lindsay's act had no bearing on the case, no bearing whatever. The paper he destroyed was valueless."

And then, with conflicting emotions, they listened to the words that framed the last wishes of Eric Lindsay's heart. The Manor, with all its contents, its revenues, and properties, was given to Hugh without condition, and in words, tender in spite of their legal phraseology, that showed the old man's perfect trust. To Aunt Estelle he restored the great fortune she had brought her husband, intact, with interest and settled in paying investments. To Mildred he left a sum which, in addition to her own modest competence, secured her forever from the reach of want. On Gertrude Waring, his ward and dearly-beloved child, he settled fifty thousand dollars, joined to the wish that she might ever bear him in kindly remembrance, for he had loved her well.

And then as Mr. Banks read on, Hugh, listening, knew that his uncle had treasured every word he had ever spoken, every wish he had ever expressed. All his people were remembered, his mother, Agatha, France, and Phil. Directions were given for the refitting of the Hall in the Southern Acre, as it was called, and Hugh was left to choose its inmate. Doubtless Uncle Eric felt that, large as the Manor was, it could not hold two mistresses, and that Hugh would want the mother he loved near him.

And then, to crown it all, he said that if the desire expressed by him so long ago, of taking Laurence Lindsay's body home, still existed in Hugh's breast, he was given freedom to do exactly as he pleased in the matter.

After that came bequests and pensions for the servants and the people who had served him so long and faithfully. But it is safe to say that only Aunt Estelle heard these. Laurence had dropped into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. Hugh's brows were drawn together in lines of pain. He could not speak when Mr. Banks finished reading, and folded the crackling parchment sheet again.

There was dead silence, which Laurence, rousing, broke. He came forward, and put his hand on his cousin's shoulder.

"I congratulate you, Cousin Hugh," he said, "with all my heart. You have only got what you deserved."

"I thank you," answered Hugh, simply. "In return I want to say something to you. A few moments ago you made a supreme sacrifice—that it was ineffectual does not detract one iota from its value. Now will you accept from the man to whom you would have given so much, free gift and right and title to the Hall in the Southern Acre?"

"Hugh—"

"Nay, then it shall be my wedding-gift to Mildred—it is but right that she should bring you even your home in the Lindsay you love. You can not refuse me now, cousin—you will have no objection to that, I am sure."

* * * * *

It was wearing on to evening before things were even partly settled. Hugh felt that he must escape from the library, from Aunt Estelle and from the sound of Mr. Banks' curt sentences. He had surprised the lawyer by his quick perception, his thorough grasping of details. But then he had had a fine business training, the last thing thought necessary in a Lindsay. Leaving the library, he made his way to the furthest corner of the great hall, seeking the big easy-chair he knew it contained. He did not want

to go upstairs, or to leave the house, since at any moment Aunt Estelle might call upon him.

In the midst of the confusion of that long day—that day in which events crowded upon one another, there was one predominant feeling—one feeling that carried him almost off his feet with deep thankfulness. And it was a feeling of which, too, he felt partly ashamed. This new sensation was the joy of being free—of release from bonds that had been galling this last month. He could not understand himself. What passion of madness had ever blinded him that he, the cool, the calm, the steady, had been so attracted by a personality with which he had nothing in common! If Leigh Fenton ever came before him again he felt that he could look upon her unmoved, as at a stranger.

As he approached the resting-place he sought, he saw that it was occupied, and by Gertrude. She was huddled up in it, her white countenance almost unearthly in the semi-dusk. He came close to her, looking down upon her, unconscious of what his face said, knowing not what tenderness was in his eyes. He felt as if suddenly awakened from a fever-dream. Here was reality, here was peace. He seemed to have been wandering with uneasy feet through fields of scarlet and of gold, covered with gorgeous flowers whose bright tints hurt his eyes—straying suddenly into the cool whiteness of a daisied sward, in the pure, mild sunlight of a day in spring.

“Gertrude!” he said, softly, “Gertrude!”

She started violently, looking at him with frightened eyes.

“Yes, Cousin Hugh?”

“What a heartbroken voice! Let me sit down beside you for a few minutes.”

She moved up, and he took the place she made for him on the wide seat. She did not speak again, nor did he, until he reached over and took her hand.

“Tell me what your thoughts are here in the darkness,” he said, gently. “Of what are you thinking?”

“I was wondering how I could go to my own room again to-night,” she answered, “and if it would be the same as last night.

I could not sleep at all, Cousin Hugh—every time I dozed off I thought Uncle Eric was calling me. I am so tired—”

Her voice became indistinct. He waited, but no more words came. The nervous grasp of her fingers about his relaxed slowly—somehow his very presence gave her courage. He put his other hand over hers, and still waited. The brown head drooped, resting on his arm, and looking down at her, he knew that she had fallen asleep.

And so an hour passed.

Aunt Estelle came out of the library, looking for him. He heard her high-voiced questioning, he heard the lawyer's sharp tones, impatient at his non-appearance. Mildred and Laurence stood in the center of the hall discussing his possible whereabouts. They could not see over the tall back of the big chair, and he smiled. He heard them despatch Wills to Matthew's cottage with a message for him, and listened to Aunt Estelle as she sent the butler to look once more in Mr. Hugh's room—perhaps he was lying down. But the man so eagerly sought sat there unmoved. Not for Lindsay Manor itself would he have disturbed the peaceful slumber of the girl whose head rested on his shoulder. Gently he had moved his arm until it encircled her, and she slipped, with relaxed muscles, into a more comfortable position. Let them hunt for him as they might—let them find him, too, for all he cared. But this hour was his, and he would have it, though the world went mad.

Gertrude herself broke its peaceful spell. She started violently. Her eyes flared open, and half-awake, she clung to him trembling.

“Uncle Eric, Uncle Eric!” she said in little gasps. “They told me you were dead—oh, they told me you were dead—”

He held her close until she realized that it was but a dream, and then soothed her with gentle words.

“You are on the brink of nervous exhaustion,” he said. “You can not stand this any longer. Nor will I. I have thought of many things while you were sleeping—and I want you to do your Cousin Hugh one favor—only one.”

She looked at him questioningly.

"Be ready to go back with me to Westport to-morrow afternoon. I can not leave Lindsay very long—but it is absolutely necessary that I go to New York to settle my affairs there. I can make that an excuse for accompanying you. Come home to mother, who is longing for a sight of her little girl's face, I know. Come to mother and to France and to Phil, to the spring of our Connecticut woods and the peace and love of home."

"Oh, Hugh—*home!* But you—"

"I will have to return here at once—you see I have planned it all out. We'll get home Thursday night, and Friday and Saturday I will spend in New York. I'll run back to Westport over Sunday and leave Sunday night for the Manor. Won't that be quick work? What plans mother will have I do not know—only this I realize, that my future will be spent here. There must be one little while of mother-love and tenderness for you, Gertrude, and you shall have it."

And so indeed it was arranged. Aunt Estelle wept, saying it was sheer madness, but afraid to express her sentiments more strongly when she read the look on Hugh's face. Mr. Banks did not see how they could finish everything in the half-day Mr. Lindsay allotted, and Hugh told him pleasantly that what they did not finish would have to be deferred until his return. There were protestations on all sides. Gertrude, despite the joy the very thought had given her, weakened at the general disapproval, and asked him to let her go alone. There was a grim firmness about his mouth—the grimness she had learned to know. He told her all she had to do was to pack her portmanteau, and not waste any words. Which speech, though it sounded harsh, made her pulses leap with gladness. It is ever the way with women to make sacrifices and to plead against the very things they most desire. And there is no pleasure like the pleasure of being denied the wish they do not want. The master of the Manor carried things with a high hand, and did exactly as he pleased.

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Hugh's mother had not been well that winter, though the spring months seemed to bring her strength. Hugh's telegram,

apprising her of Gertrude's arrival, carried no hint of the news awaiting her—that the thing she had desired above all others had come to pass, and that her boy was not to marry Leigh Fenton.

France and Phil stood at the gate with her, watching as the hour approached that was to bring the more than welcome visitor. Phil's sharp eyes were the first to see the carriage, and he ran tearing along the road like the boy he was, kicking up a great cloud of dust. The journey had exhausted what little strength her long hours of watching had left the girl. Only the greatness of her desire to come to those who cared for her kept her up. When Phil, with a daring leap, jumped up on the step of the swiftly moving vehicle, and with a yell, thrust his head through the open window, she could but smile in greeting. A sign from Hugh served to moderate his boyish welcome. Just then the carriage stopped at the gate and Hugh, getting out first, had almost to lift the slim figure from the seat. When Mrs. Lindsay's pitying, shocked face turned to her, she stood erect, and stumbled rather than walked into the extended arms.

"Hugh," said the mother, slowly, looking down into the senseless face on her bosom, "you have brought me my heart's desire."

"Mother," he answered, his tones vibrating with deepest feeling. "I have brought you mine."

The light of great gladness overspread the mother's face. She did not know how it had happened, but she felt that all was well.

* * * * *

When Hugh came back "over Sunday," as he had said, his mother would not let him see Gertrude. She was too nervous and too weak to stand any excitement now—not even the possible pleasant excitement of seeing him. But he had much to relate of the events of this last few months, and though he told her nothing of his new-found affection for the girl, the mother understood.

It would be like tearing up her heart to leave Westport, but she could not bear to be separated from her son, and she, too, saw clearly that his duty hereafter lay at Lindsay Manor. Things would arrange themselves she told him now, and after they had done so to his satisfaction he could return for them all.

The two months that passed after this were happy and peaceful ones for all concerned. Mildred and Laurence were married very quietly in the Roman Catholic Church at Kentboro, for Mildred would not be separated from her beloved in religion. When they went away on their honeymoon Hugh had the Hall refitted for them, according to his uncle's wishes—there was room and to spare for that dear mother of his in Lindsay Manor, though indeed there might not have been had Leigh Fenton come there as mistress.

Then Hugh spoke to Aunt Estelle of the future. He told her she could settle on whatever part of Lindsay Manor pleased her best—that the side of the house she chose would be her exclusive property, and that no one would interfere with her privacy. He would be more delighted than words could say if she would like his family and become part of it. But whether she could or not remained still to prove, and until it was proved she must not think her position any different from what it had been all these years.

And then, the two months having expired, and things having “arranged themselves” indeed, the master of the Manor came back for his mother and Gertrude and France and Phil. Agatha, of course—a lonely Agatha, losing all her home folk at one blow!—must stay at Westport. But there were long visits in prospect for her as soon as “John could get away.” She had striven by every means in her power to make up to Gertrude for the pain she had caused her, and so well had she succeeded that her place in the girl’s heart was almost equal to that France held.

Hugh did not knock at once for admission as he stood outside the parlor-window looking in at the little group. His mother was sitting with her mending in her lap—was that woman ever idle? he thought with a half-smile. Gertrude, with France and Phil on either side, sat reading aloud. Occasionally she looked up at his mother with a comment on her lips, and his mother nodded or smiled. He stood there a long time watching them. The girl’s young face was round and softly-colored—all its wanness flown. But there was a gravity about her, a womanliness that he

had never noticed before, which gave her a strange fascination. He sighed. Lindsay was his and all of Lindsay—but would he ever know such happiness there as he had known in that small room?

He brought the old-fashioned knocker heavily down on the door then. He heard them moving in the parlor and Phil came to admit the visitor, while France's face peeped at him from between the portières.

“It's Hugh, mom, it's Hugh!” cried Phil.

No other words were needed. His mother, scattering her mending all about her, followed France and Phil. In another moment he was surrounded. France had one hand, Phil the other—his mother was kissing him. Gertrude was standing in the center of the room, a glad light of welcome on her face.

“Oh, Hugh, my boy, my son, how pale you are!” cried the mother. “And how thin! Oh, Hugh!”

“You only imagine it, mother—I'm all right,” he made answer. “Everything packed? We're off for South Carolina in the morning!”

“Oh, not so soon, Hugh; surely not so soon as that? Another week, dear—”

He looked at her with a teasing light in his eyes.

“If Gertrude asks me very nicely, perhaps—”

The mother knew at once what was in her boy's heart.

“Come,” she said. “Come, children, let us give Gertrude a chance to ask him nicely. We want another week of Westport, don't we, France and Phil?” Thus adjuring them, she put them out before her, smiling back at the two she left. Was there ever such a mother in the world, thought Hugh, with a light heart, as he went to the sofa and sat down upon it. Gertrude looked with longing eyes toward the door, and indeed had made a step toward it when his voice stopped her.

“Well,” he asked, “where are you going?”

“Outside—to put away—mother might—” she stumbled, blushing.

“Aren't you going to ask me?”

"Ask you?" her fingers, intertwined over each other, clasped nervously. "What shall I ask you, Hugh?"

"Oh, Gertrude, come here." He jumped up boyishly, caught her arm, and brought her to the sofa with him. She did not resist him when he made her sit down upon it. Then instead of placing himself beside her, he knelt on the floor in front of her, looking up into her sweet face. All the levity had faded from his own.

"Gertrude!" he said in tones of deepest feeling. "Gertrude, my heart's desire! Will you forgive me? Can you forgive me ever, dear, that looking past you, ignoring you, I pursued a light of lesser value? Gertrude, my little love!"

"Are you sure—this time?" she asked in a low voice.

"Let the future prove—it will if you love me," he answered.

"Oh, Hugh!" she said, and that was all. For indeed she loved him. And Gertrude Waring had never been one to cloak her feelings, or to hide them. She had never been able to pretend. And she loved him. So that now when he spoke those humble, loving, pleading words to her, she let the great thankfulness and tenderness of her loyal heart creep into her face. He needed no other answer. He drew her down toward him and kissed her on the lips.

"Gertrude, my heart's desire!" he said.

* * * * *

And that is all, dear readers. The Lindsays left Westport a week later, and though at first Mrs. Lindsay regretted her Northern home very much, the novelty of her new surroundings and the delight of having her son always with her soon accustomed her to the change. Aunt Estelle, occupying her own suite of rooms in the eastern wing, found place in the family circle that had grown so large, and that yet, from the pure love that bound them all together, was supremely happy. Ere long she had no fear that she would not like this one or that one. They were so very kind to her and so very gentle that the good woman's heart expanded with a joy of life she had never thought to experience.

And so we leave them. Even old Matthew Horton is still alive, though most of his days are spent on the porch of his little

cottage. There is a small Eric Lindsay, who, if he lives, will be the master of the Manor—and, indeed, is that now, despite the scarceness of his years. The gentle peace of a true home has made of Lindsay an earthly paradise—for love has found it and blessed it.

One echo came from the past—the news of Leigh Fenton's marriage to a wealthy Englishman. She was to be a countess, Mrs. Fenton informed her neighbors with pride. Hugh Lindsay, when he read the news, bent over his wife's shoulder and looked into her loving eyes.

“‘Kind hearts are more than coronets
And simple faith than Norman blood,’”

he said, tenderly. “Gertrude, my wife, my sweetheart, my heart's desire!”

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